

# HEARTS' HAVEN

CLARA · LOUISE · BURNHAM

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To

Mallie + Nathaniel

Christmas Greeting

Nellie.

1918.





**By Clara Louise Burnham**

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HEARTS' HAVEN. Illustrated by Helen Mason Grose.

INSTEAD OF THE THORN. With frontispiece.

THE RIGHT TRACK. With frontispiece in color.

THE GOLDEN DOG. Illustrated in color.

THE INNER FLAME. With frontispiece in color.

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**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY**

**BOSTON AND NEW YORK**

## HEARTS' HAVEN







HELEN M. GROSS.

# HEARTS' HAVEN

A NOVEL

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

*With Illustrations*



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

1918

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*Published October 1918*

TO M. R. K.  
DEAR SISTER AND DEARER FRIEND  
I OFFER THIS STORY OF  
HER NAMESAKE



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# *HEARTS' HAVEN*

## CHAPTER I

MAY CA'LINE

THE Leacock Post Office was in Simon Berry's store, and his wife, Martha, being the close friend of Hetty Woodward, the postmistress, frequently remained after the mail was distributed for a chat with her crony.

To-day Mrs. Berry's plump face was clouded as she approached the wiry Hetty, who was brushing back her gray elf-locks in the calm of duty performed, and chewing gum with nervous energy.

"Did you see how bad May Ca'line looked as she went out just now?" she asked.

"First time you noticed it?"

"Yes; I have n't seen her for quite a spell. What's the matter with her, Hetty?"

"Hungry, for one thing, I'm pretty sure. She owes Simon a good big bill now, and she don't ask any more credit; and the work that's been comin' to her from the Woman's Exchange in the city has stopped, and yesterday there come a long envelope for her and when she saw the business firm's name up in the corner she turned white as a cloth. I tell you, May Ca'line's had it hard for the whole seven years since her husband died, and I'd like to take her boy Joe and shake him till every one of his teeth chattered."

"Hungry, Hetty!" ejaculated Mrs. Berry, sinking

upon a stool opposite where Miss Woodward held the floor on her own side of the counter.

"I'm sure of it, and somebody'd ought to tell that selfish cub of a Joe — goin' to the city and saddlin' himself with a wife and children before he was hardly out o' creepers and hardly ever writin' to his mother. His sister Amy 'way off there in California never does. I tell you, Martha, for the village beauty May Ca'line made a mighty poor end. I'll bet there's been many a day when she's wished she'd married the other feller."

"Who?"

"Adam Breed. Don't you remember how crazy he was about her? And he was n't any village carpenter either. He was one o' the up-and-comin' kind."

"But May Ca'line did right to marry the man she loved," pleaded Martha.

"How do you know Joseph was the one? She was engaged to him before she ever saw Adam. Poor thing, I was thinkin' to-day how pretty she is yet, even though she looks so thin and kind o' wrinkly."

"Yes," agreed Martha. "It beats all how it does help in all the seven ages o' man to have curly hair, and hers is as coppery as ever it was, while you and I are turnin' gray." Mrs. Berry was silent for a thoughtful moment. "You know I can't get it through my head, Hetty. May Ca'line's always been such a gay thing, and such a one to see the funny side of everything."

"Did you ever hear o' the thing they call *bluff*?" returned Hetty dryly. "Did you ever hear o' folks that was *game*? Those two words hit off May Ca'line as slick as a button; but she pretty near went down under whatever was in that envelope yesterday and she had n't got over it to-day."

"Hungry," repeated Martha again as if to herself. "Good-bye, Het, I must be off," she added, rising and leaving the store.

As fast as her comfortable, stout figure could accomplish it she walked home; and after a few moments spent in her kitchen, left the house and turned in the direction of her old friend's home. May Ca'line's was a cottage of generous size, but its unpainted, neglected look had never impressed Mrs. Berry so fully. It was the common lot in Leacock to be poor. The decline, and almost fall, of the dead carpenter's house had come gradually, and his widow had always had a way of deflecting sympathy or criticism, and inducing a factitious atmosphere of well-being about herself and the visitor, whoever it might be, that distracted attention from her lacks.

As Martha Berry stood a minute by the gate, noticing that one rusty hinge was paired with a scrap of flannel nailed on to prevent the rickety affair from sagging hopelessly, she reflected on the lonely occupant of the cottage and of the years of her loneliness.

"But a body can't think of May Ca'line as lonely somehow," she muttered. "She's a kind of a witch."

She opened the gate and went up the well-weeded garden path to the peeling door and knocked.

If she had not known that her old friend was incapable of fear, she would have said the slender face which now appeared around the edge of the slowly opening door expressed alarm, from the large gray eyes, whose drooping corners had been so attractive in their owner's youth, to the half-parted, trembling lips.

"Why, it's you, Martha!" said Mrs. Laird, in a tone which certainly betokened relief, as she flung wide the door.

"Well, who did you think it was?" asked Mrs. Berry.

"I thought" — May Ca'line assumed a gay air of mystery — "I thought — you might be — a man!"

"Since when was you afraid of a man?" inquired the visitor, her passing suspicion already swamped in the good-cheer of the wide gray eyes.

"Oh, me in my wrapper," answered the other, indicating her faded clean calico. "Before you come in, Martha, I want you to look at my pansies. Have you seen any bigger ones anywhere?"

Mrs. Berry turned to view the orderly flower beds on each side of the neatly weeded path.

"They're lovely," she answered, "and your geraniums, too. You're a kind of a witch, May Ca'line. I was saying it to myself as I came in the gate. Flowers grow for you better than they will for anybody else."

"If I was a witch I'd have a lawn-mower," said the other, looking at the rank or withered grass which covered the rest of her yard, accordingly as it was in sun or shade. "I'd have a hose and a lawn-mower besides my watering-pot and scissors. I will, too, when my ship comes in." The little nod with which the declaration was accompanied was the spontaneous, quick gesture of her girlhood. The waves of her auburn hair were but lightly streaked with gray; but her face, in the midday light, showed woefully thin and lined.

"I guess you work too hard out in the sun," said Mrs. Berry, as they went into the house. "You can't afford to get any thinner, May Ca'line. You make me feel like a great porpoise."

Mrs. Berry sank into a hair-cloth rocker that had burst in lines which showed gray, and placed on the floor beside her a bundle. As her hostess threw open

the blinds the caller cast a hasty glance around the sitting-room. Everything was ragged, in spite of repeated darnings. Poverty seemed to cry out from each old chair and the threadbare rugs on the broken matting.

"I keep the sun out all the time I'm not using this room," said Mrs. Laird, "but I don't like darkness better than light when I have good company."

"Simon could n't come home to supper to-day," said Mrs. Berry, "so, thinks I, I'll take a little holiday and run over to May Ca'line's."

It was a direct challenge to rural hospitality. The hostess had no alternative to replying cordially: "Then you'll have your supper with me. Take your things right off."

But Mrs. Laird did not speak at once. Her sensitive lips tightened instead of opening, for an appreciable instant. The caller felt such a twinge of mingled compassion and embarrassment that the warmth of the summer day seemed suddenly doubled and her plump face grew scarlet.

"I'll just throw off my shawl, if you don't mind, May Ca'line. I walked pretty brisk and I'm just about melted."

"Why, of course, Martha, and here's a palm-leaf fan." The hostess rose and seized it from the wooden mantelpiece. "You'll cool off in a minute. There's a real good draught through this room; and did you ever think how beautifully Nature arranges the sun for us?" she added admiringly. "All winter how it streams in our south windows, and in summer, when we don't want it, how it's lifted right up into the middle of the sky out of the way of the windows?"

"Well, that's so," agreed Mrs. Berry. "I don't know as I ever thought of it before."

She was fanning herself vigorously and avoiding the eyes in the thin face regarding her, the face that had looked so startled a few minutes ago.

"You *look* as if you'd been kind o' slack in catering for yourself," she responded. "You need some one to look after you, May Ca'line."

"Oh, don't mind me, Martha, I'm always thin in summer. It's all the style, anyway, you know," said the other with her most nonchalant air.

"H'm," responded Mrs. Berry. "What do you hear from Amy?"

Mrs. Laird laughed and sighed. "Whatever put Amy into your head?" she asked.

"Well, 'a daughter's a daughter all her life,' you know," suggested Mrs. Berry.

"Yes, if you've taught her to be a good letter-writer. I don't hear very often."

"And Joe," pursued Martha Berry grimly. "'A son is a son till he gets him a wife.' What do you hear from Joe?"

The thin cheeks were much flushed by this time, but their owner laughed and tossed her auburn waves airily. "Dear me, Martha, you've come over in a real catechizing mood, have n't you? Joe is all right, so far as I know. I suppose he has to scratch gravel pretty busily for the wife and two children. You know men never do write letters much, anyway; not any more than they can possibly help."

The speaker clasped her needle-pricked hands hard together, and her eyes looked very bright. "To tell the honest truth, Martha, I wish you'd had your supper

first and then come over to see me, just because I *am* so slack. You know it's such a temptation to picnic when you're alone."

"Why, I eat too much, anyway, May Ca'line. Don't worry about me. Just let me have whatever you're goin' to have. It's too hot to eat much to-day. A cup o' tea and some bread and butter and cold meat is supper enough on a day like this."

Mrs. Laird bit her lip. "Oh, Martha, don't tell anybody how careless I am. I have n't been making bread lately because it did n't seem worth while for only one, and I have n't bought any to-day. I'm so ashamed I have n't any to offer you."

"May Ca'line,"—Mrs. Berry's eyes snapped,—“what did you have for dinner?”

"Catechizing again." Mrs. Laird laughed, but her lips trembled. "Did n't I tell you that I just pick up?"

As she spoke the last word the sound of the gate opening and closing with a loud bang came through the open window.

The widow's face blanched and as she sprang from her place her hands pressed quickly over her heart.

"Who's that!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Berry's chair commanded the window.

"It was just some children," she replied. "A boy passed the gate and slammed it as he passed. Could n't think of anything more mischievous to do, I suppose."

Mrs. Laird sank back in her chair, but kept her hands on the heart that threatened to escape.

"May Ca'line," said Mrs. Berry quietly, "tell me all about it."

"About what?"

"I never did you a mean trick in my life, and I never will. You've got to confide in somebody. Take me."

"There's nothing you can do to help me, Martha." The life had gone out of the pale face and the gray eyes were suddenly heavy and spiritless.

"Perhaps I can. You've put the best foot forward all your life and enough's enough."

"I have n't — any best foot — any more," said May Ca'line. Her slight, drooping figure lifted and she looked despairingly at her old friend. "There don't seem to be any place for me in the world any more, Martha," she said simply. "After my husband's death it seemed necessary to mortgage the house, and — and I've stood it off as long as I could, but — I got the notice yesterday. They're going to foreclose and I've got to go — and where, Martha, where in the world can I go?"

"To Joe, of course," returned Mrs. Berry sharply. The slight figure and appealing face pulled at her heart-strings. It was unthinkable that May Ca'line's gay defenses could all come down and reveal a tragic spirit. "Where should a woman go but to her boy? Joe Laird ain't a monster. Seem's if you could n't have been honest with him."

"I don't believe I have been honest. I don't think I'm very honest with anybody, Martha. I could n't be."

The slender fingers knotted together and the voice trembled.

"Well, it's come to where you've got to be, May Ca'line. You see that, don't you?"

The other nodded. "Oh, yes. I wrote him last night. It was terribly hard, because they don't want me, and I've thought and thought if there was anything else

I could do, but there does n't seem to be. People don't even need you to scrub for them here."

"How can you be so sure those young folks don't want you?" Mrs. Berry tried to speak comfortingly. She longed to take her old friend to her own home, but she knew Simon would not consent and her heart ached at the sight of the tearless eyes and the starved body that had made such a long and gallant fight.

"Oh, I know, Martha," was the sad reply. "I know only too well. Things have been harder and harder for a long time and I've thrown out hints when I was writing, but Joe never took them. I think perhaps it's his wife's influence; but you can't blame her. I'm a stranger and she thinks they have a right to their life. Many a night this last year I've prayed to go to my Father's house where there are many mansions, for it seems as if fate was just forcing me, little by little, out of this world; but I guess the hardest thing in life is to die when you want to."

"May Ca'line, don't talk so!" ejaculated Mrs. Berry desperately. "See here, I just suspected you might not have anything in the house for company and I brought over a few things." She picked up the bundle from the floor. "Come out in the kitchen and let me show you."

"How awful it is," said the hostess, eyeing the package spiritlessly, but rising obediently and following her friend's determined figure. "You remember, Martha, how I used to have the sewing-circle sometimes, and I think they had as pleasant a time and as good things to eat here as anywhere."

"Indeed we did," was the hearty response. "There was n't a better cook than you in town, and there was always more fun and more doin' around where you were

than anywhere else. Yes, indeed, you had your day, May Ca'line, and you've pulled the wool over my eyes completely right along. You'd ought to go on the stage and be an actress. Now, you sit down on that chair and I'm going to get us some supper."

Mrs. Laird obeyed. Her lips were parted, her eyes expressionless as they watched the expert movements of her guest.

"When folks have had their day, would n't it be fine if they could get out and give others a chance!" she said when Mrs. Berry's racket at the stove had abated.

"Now, don't think about that. 'T ain't a bit like you. When Joe gets this letter he'll sense things different and you'll see, he'll come and take you right home."

"That's the worst of all. It's just misery to think of it. Worse than all the pinching and all the pretending and all the worry and loneliness."

"You need a good meal o' victuals," declared Mrs. Berry, snapping her eyelids together, "and you're goin' to get it. The things only need to be het up."

"You're very kind, Martha. I don't know what you may have saved me from, coming over to-day. I felt — the most desperate I ever have."

"There, there," returned the guest vaguely.

An appetizing fragrance began to rise from the stove.

## CHAPTER II

### THE YOUNG COUPLE

MRS. JOSEPH LAIRD'S temper was not at its best in the morning. The effort to secure the most entertainment her husband's salary could provide, and yet keep up such an appearance in her home as should not injure her pride when friends dropped in, seemed a problem involving much strain: it pressed most upon her in the early hours of the day.

She did not attempt to breakfast with Joe. The duties of her one maid-of-all-work were elastic, but they could not cover getting and serving Mr. Laird's breakfast and dressing the twins; so Mrs. Laird dragged herself out of bed yawning, and in her kimono struggled with the obstreperous five-year-olds, Bob and Ella, who, by the time she reached their room were usually bursting with animal spirits, the result of a long night's sleep, and the fleeting visit which their father always made them before descending to his hurried cup of coffee.

Joe Laird was tall and lean and his young face was rather haggard. His long hours of close work, the home responsibilities which he had assumed so early, and the exigencies of a wife whose creed it was that there was no place like home to get away from in the evening, combined to give him a hunted look; but to the twins he was just Dad, and his early daily appearance in the nursery was always greeted joyfully. That toss toward the ceiling that followed his kiss and was succeeded too soon by a rush downstairs to breakfast left them in the effervescent and noisy state which their mother en-

dured while sleepily making their toilet. Their gayety was usually soon jerked out of them, and was followed by the quarrelsome whining which was their customary mode of expression.

It can easily be seen that Joe Laird would not choose the morning in which to discuss an unpleasant subject with his wife; and he had learned in many tentative interviews that any suggestion of the introduction of his mother into their home was most unwelcome.

The letters from Leacock had been cheerful until the last year; but during that stressful period, as May Ca'line had confessed to her friend, the mother had thrown out many a desperate hint as to her straitened and straitening circumstances; hints which had always spurred her boy to renewed effort to awaken his wife's hospitality, but which proved unchangeably vain.

A line had already come in Joe Laird's young forehead. He had inherited his mother's good looks and the waves of her auburn hair. Gladys, in occasional discontented reflections upon how much better she might have done, always came back to the conviction that Joe had been the most romantic lover in the world.

At last there came a day, the very one upon which Martha Berry cooked a meal in her old friend's kitchen, when Joe Laird came home at evening with somber and determined eyes.

"Oh, dear, you're late, Joe," was his wife's greeting. "Did n't you remember this is the night of the dance?"

"So it is," returned her husband. "It did slip my mind, but it could n't have made any difference. We had some extra business at the office to-day."

His voice was weary, his face pale with the heat, and his eyes rested indifferently on his wife, whose pink

gown and careful coiffure showed her ready for the terpsichorean fray.

"Well, can't you say my dress is sweet? I finished it only to-day."

She bridled for his inspection.

"It is that! I guess you're a pretty clever girl, Gladys," the young man replied as he kissed her lightly and hung his hat on the rack.

"Well, wash your hands quick and let us have dinner. It's waiting."

Joe presented himself very soon and regarded his wife, who, hurried as she was, took time to turn herself about again for his admiration. Her idea of style was in the day of short gowns to wear her skirt a little shorter than did her equally ambitious neighbor; and in a day of close hair-dressing to plaster her raven locks in sweeping curves more flat to her temples and more completely eclipsing her ears than was usual. Her black eyes glowed with satisfaction. Joe would escort the most modish girl in the assembly and one of the best looking. She wanted him to appreciate it.

He nodded and tried to assume the expression she expected of him, but he was very tired and he sank into his chair at table, while still nodding.

"You're a peach, all right, Gladys," he said.

She tripped over to her own place, smiling.

"What do you suppose they'd say to changing the dance into a trolley party to-night?" her husband suggested as he began carving the meat.

"In these clothes?" She laughed.

"That's so. I suppose all the girls will be too flossy for a ride, but it's awfully hot to dance and I'm dog-tired."

Gladys smoothed out a sudden frown. "You'll feel different after dinner," she returned. This husband-coaxing was weary business she reflected, and Joe was always tired lately.

"You never went out home with me except the one time just after we were married, did you, Gladys?"

"No, that was enough for me! How glad you must have been to get away from that little hole of a Leacock."

"Yes, I was. Gladder than I would be now," said Joe in the same dull, quiet voice he had been using.

Joe Laird stirred his iced tea and looked across at his wife. "I have n't been a good son, Gladys. I hope Bob will never treat us as I did mother in the matter of our marriage."

"What do you mean?"

"I should have taken her into my confidence. Mother ought to have had the chance to see her only son married."

Gladys shrugged her shoulders and conveyed a fork full of peas — canned peas — to her red lips.

"Oh, you told her why afterwards. You told her we could n't afford to have any wedding and we decided it would save embarrassment to both sides of the house if we slipped off quietly and told of it afterward."

"Yes, but I knew later that it gave mother a great blow. I had told her I was in love with you, but she naturally thought that we would have a long engagement as other poor young folks do." The speaker was silent for a thoughtful moment. "She was very brave and very kind to us when we went out there."

"Oh, yes, she was all right, but what a place to have to live!"

"I think she has lived there too long," responded Joe Laird quietly.

His wife looked up with quick suspicion, and a hard look grew around her mouth.

"She probably likes it," she returned. "You know how older people cling to their homes. What's got you started on this to-night, Joe?"

"Two letters I received to-day. One was from the Leacock grocer calling me down for several pages because I did n't look after my mother better, and sending me a bill she has n't been able to pay him. I'll let you read it."

"No, you won't; I don't want to read it." Gladys's eyes sparkled. "You won't allow me to run up bills. Why should she, and then expect you to pay them?"

"Mr. Berry says she has — has worked hard to eke out her living. My mother must be nearly fifty."

"That is n't old," retorted Gladys. "The club women to-day are active at seventy and more. Why should n't she work? She's much happier that way, I'm sure."

"My second letter was from her," went on Joe in the same unmoved voice. "She has written me with the utmost cheerfulness until this year, and I've written her so seldom."

"Men are n't expected to write letters."

"No, their wives usually do it for them."

Gladys shrugged again. "Oh, I hate it; and how could I write your mother anyway? She never would understand our life."

"She could understand news of her son and the children."

Gladys laid down her knife and fork. "What got us talking about all this?" she asked. "Do cheer up, Joe.

You're in a nice mood to go to a dance, and I've had such a long day! You know the kindergarten has closed and the children have acted like all possessed."

"I think mother could help you with them."

"Oh, no, thank you!" — hastily — "I don't want her."

"I'm sorry to hear it, for the time has come. She writes me of the foreclosure of the mortgage on the cottage."

Gladys grew as pink as her gown. Her eyes shone ominously. "Why did n't she tell you sooner? She had no right to let it come to this."

"I imagine she knew I could n't carry any more than I do. Never mind whys or wherefores. Mother has to come to us."

"That means more economy. I slave and slave and sew for myself and the children and save every penny, and it would be worse than ever if we had her to take care of."

"We have her to take care of, and I'm going to Leacock Saturday night to bring her here on Sunday."

"You shall not do it, Joe! You don't mean it!" Gladys breathed fast, and the angry tears sprang.

"I mean it very decidedly." The young man spoke slowly. "If you do not agree to the arrangement we will have to move to a cheaper place so that I can pay her board elsewhere."

"We can't go into an apartment with the children. Even this miserable little back yard we have is invaluable. At least there are no automobiles in it."

"Well, that is for you to decide," responded Joe.

She studied him for full sixty seconds of silence. The lean, white face was so strong that for the minute she

hated him. He went on with his dinner and did not return or seem conscious of her gaze. As a matter of fact, he was wondering when and how he could pay that grocery bill of twenty dollars.

His gay little mother, always turning an intrepid face toward past, present, and future! He remembered how every playmate of his childhood had loved to be in her presence and catch the infection of her fun and the good-cheer that emanated from her as perfume from the rose; and what a tender mother she had been to him! How ready her sympathy when he wanted to leave home and seek his fortune in the city! How spontaneous her sacrifices; how undaunted her behavior since he had failed her, yes, failed her in his selfish, impulsive youth.

He cast a quick glance across at his rose-clad wife. Her parents had courted him and hurried them to the altar. He could find excuses for himself in many a memory, but he had enough of his mother in him not to seek his own leniency, nor to indulge unchivalrous thoughts.

"You must decide, Gladys," he said again with emphasis. "Believe me, my mother hates to come here worse than you hate to have her. She is alive in every nerve to the fact that it is a bitter necessity. We have not shown her enough care or attention for her to have any illusions; so think it over and make up your mind. Can't you see my position? Can't you see that I'm up against it?"

Gladys's eyes drooped heavily. "I don't feel much like dancing," she said.

"May we call it off?" he asked hopefully.

"No," she snapped. "I've seen enough of this house to-day."

It was the first time Joe had stood out against her in

any discussion. She sent him inimical, covert glances from time to time as they finished the henceforth silent meal. Gladys's fleeting examination of her husband convinced her that on one subject at least she was going to find him adamant; and resentment and dismay possessed her.

## CHAPTER III

### MRS. BERRY'S ADVICE

MRS. BERRY was dusting the best room one morning when Mrs. Laird surprised her.

"I came to the kitchen door, Martha, and there was nobody there, so I came right through. Joe's coming."

The speaker, her hat slightly awry, was breathless and all alight and quivering. "It was a telegram," she went on. "Here it is. He says for me to be ready to go back with him."

Mrs. Berry tried to speak with extra calm in the face of a tremulous excitement. "That's good. Sit down, May Ca'line." She took the offered envelope and moving her spectacles down from the top of her head, read the contents. "H'm. He's comin', ain't he? Well, that's good," she said soothingly.

"But what have I got to wear, Martha?" It was a piteous appeal.

"Well, I'll come over and we'll look through your things. Yes, this is Thursday and he's comin' Saturday. We'll fix you up. Now, don't you worry, May Ca'line."

Mrs. Berry seated herself near her visitor in whose mobile face and expressive eyes joy and apprehension were alternating.

"I have n't seen him for a year, and yet when I think of what his coming means—" The speaker choked on the last word and brought the back of her thin hand quickly against her trembling lips.

"We can't help one chapter closing and another beginning in this changin' world," said Mrs. Berry, trying to speak philosophically, though her old friend's emotions were always so infectious that she could now feel a threatening lump begin to rise toward her own throat. "The fact is, May Ca'line, you're drove to it, you're just drove to it."

"Yes, and I've got to intrude into the home of those young people that very likely have a hard time to get along as it is, and how can they want me? It would n't be natural. Oh, Martha, if there's anything in this world I hate it's a parasite. I'm going to be a parasite."

"Why, May Ca'line Laird!" Mrs. Berry spoke with horror. "How can you call yourself a tapeworm? I guess you don't know what you're sayin'. Dr. Foster cured Jim Woodlow of one and he said it was a parasite."

Mrs. Laird mingled a slight laugh with more than a suspicion of tears. "There are different kinds," she said. "Women that hang on other folks is one."

"Well, I guess you've got a right to hang on your own son."

Mrs. Laird used her handkerchief dolorously. "It does seem so good to think of seeing Joe. Every little while I forget that he's married and I'm so happy for a minute I can hardly contain myself."

"H'm, you would be," returned Mrs. Berry dryly. She was wont to say, speaking of her friend's nearly irrepressible optimism, that there was nothing in this world May Ca'line so closely resembled as a cork. If fate for one moment relaxed the pressure that submerged her, quick as a wink she was floating again on top of the wave.

Just at this moment, however, the optimist looked small and shrunken and damp.

"Now, see here," suggested Mrs. Berry heartily, "perhaps that wife of Joe's is a clever sort of critter after all. Mostly where a woman's got two children and a small income she gets the angles rubbed off. Bein' up nights with twins takes the frills off anybody. Now, I don't want you should borrow any trouble, but I do want to give you a piece of advice," Mrs. Berry finished impressively.

"What is it?" was the tremulous response. Mrs. Laird's uplifted gaze looked ready to be grateful.

"If she turns out not to be clever, but acts kind o' lofty and undaughterly, I want you should hold your own."

"My own?" came the feeble echo.

"Yes; don't be meechin' with her." Mrs. Berry thrust forward her chin with a challenge. "There's folks that are the better for bein' bullied; but there ain't one that's better for bein' — bein' *meeched* to." Mrs. Berry was forced to the enriching of the English language in order to emphasize her point. "She may try to slide the housework off on to you."

"I should want to help," protested the other.

"Yes; but you don't want to cook for the whole family; and more than that you don't want to be a nursemaid at your time o' life. You've brought up one family and that's enough. You've got a right to a home with your son. Why, they say in Japan, grown-up children bow down and *worship* their parents."

"But it would be too expensive for all of us to move to Japan," returned May Ca'line, in a little voice that sounded feeble against Mrs. Berry's sonorous exhorta-

tion, but with a suggestion of the familiar twinkle in her wet eyes.

"You'd better start the way you want to go on. 'Give some folks an inch and they'll make it a hell!' Simon says; and it's true, too. You think everybody just needs wings to be an angel, and that's why I can't trust you. In some ways you have n't ever grown up, May Ca'line. Now, wipe your eyes and let's talk about your clothes. I s'pose you've got a trunk."

"It's just awful and it has n't been out of Leacock for twenty years," mourned the visitor.

"All right, then, you shall take mine; and you can express it back to me."

"No, no, that would be too expensive. Thank you, Martha, but I'll take the old one."

"Well, we'll see." Mrs. Berry regarded the hat shading her visitor's pretty hair. The bunch of violets had faded to gray and the trimming was rusty. "Have you got any other hat, May Ca'line?" she asked gently.

The postmistress had heard of Joe Laird's telegram and she was soon on the field, all interest and excitement to help her old school friend get ready for the momentous move to the city. She and Mrs. Berry both made contributions from their own wardrobes to aid in a presentable departure, and May Ca'line was too dazed to offer more than a faint protest.

When Mrs. Laird entered the room where they were working, Miss Woodward addressed her.

"I s'pose you'll go to the depot to meet Joe, won't you?" she asked.

"I can't trust myself, Hetty. I'm so nervous and silly. I know I'll cry when I see him and I'd better do it here."

"I don't blame you one bit," returned the postmistress sympathetically, recognizing her own opportunity.

The next day she was on the station platform ten minutes before train time, walking up and down in the twilight of the long summer evening. Hetty Woodward loved excitement, and there were but spare bits of it in Leacock. Even a moving picture was to be seen there but twice a week. Hetty, with her gray elf-locks flying and her inevitable chewing-gum, had it not on her conscience that she had ever missed one performance. Now she stalked up and down the platform with a martial air. It was due to Joe Laird that somebody should meet him.

"Hello, Het," greeted the station master, spitting down toward the track in a moment of leisure. "Expectin' your beau?"

"No, I ain't. Don't you know who's coming here to-night?"

Miss Woodward put the question in genuine surprise.

If Joel Beers did not know, it proved that he had not been to the post-office for two days.

"Can't say I've heard of any celebri-ety headin' this way."

"Well, Joe Laird's comin' on this train."

"What for? To git spanked? I've heard tell he needs it, lettin' May Ca'line run down till she's all eyes."

"He's comin' to get her, Joel," stated Miss Woodward importantly. "He's comin' to take her home with him to the city. May Ca'line's goin' to leave us."

"Well, she'd better while there's enough of her to go. These last weeks she's looked to me as if she was walkin' around to save funeral expenses."

"And if this forlorn village was on a straight road to

town, instead of sidetracked on a junction, we might see her sometimes," returned Miss Woodward. "While we have to go round Robin Hood's barn to get to town, how could we expect Joe Laird, busy as he is, to come often to see his mother?"

"How busy is he?" inquired Mr. Beers skeptically.

"Well, I guess there ain't anybody connected with the X. & Y. Railroad that ain't busy," retorted the postmistress, bridling.

"What is he? Train boy?" inquired Joel, grinning.

"Well, with a wife and two children, Joel Beers, and supportin' 'em, and now his mother, I guess his position ain't anything to sneeze at for such a young man."

Miss Woodward had no idea why she was hotly defending Joe Laird, whom a week ago she would have condemned to the lowest dungeon; but if one lives on a branch road in a village incapable of supporting even a movie theater, one must do the next best thing and be dramatic one's self in the gap between the red-letter nights.

Very soon after this exchange the headlight appeared around the corner, and the station master sauntered to the spot where he was wont to dodge the mail bag, and Hetty tucked her hair behind her ears, and prepared to receive the railroad magnate whom she had often, and it seemed but yesterday, driven away from her cherry trees.

Two people only descended from the train. One was Deacon Jones, who, Hetty knew, had gone to the city to bring back news to the church of a famous revival going on there. The other was a long-legged young fellow in a gray summer suit and straw sailor hat. He carried a bag, and had scarcely time to look about the

familiar platform when Miss Woodward launched herself toward him.

"Welcome, Joe Laird, welcome to your old home — if it is you — why, you're no more the apple-cheeked rascal you used to be — why, you favor your ma beyond all belief!"

During this speech Miss Woodward was hospitably sawing the air with the visitor's imprisoned hand, and Joel Beers, dragging and dropping the mail bag, approached as the train was moving on.

"Well, I cal'late it is Joe," he drawled, "but you've gone up in the air some since I seen you last, boy, and what you've gained north and south you've lost in east and west. How are you, anyway?"

Joe Laird succeeded in freeing his hand to greet the station master.

"It smells good out here," he said, and his city clothes, his carriage, and his smile, convinced Hetty on the spot that he was a loss to the film.

"You don't change a bit, Mr. Beers. It seems as if you were going to shoo me off the tracks in a minute."

"I allers said you was born to be hung," rejoined Joel cheerfully.

The visitor laughed. "My mother is n't around here, is she?"

"No, she ain't, Joe," responded Hetty. "She thought she druther meet you at home." She winked and grimaced significantly. "Feels it a good deal, you know, Joe. She feels it a good deal," she added with a throaty dolor. "Me and Martha Berry have been helpin' her to get ready to go, so I thought I'd just come over and meet you, 'cause you might think it queer, seein' nobody."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," returned Joe, the smile dying from his face and eyes, and that stern line in his forehead deepening. "Thank you ever so much, too, for helping mother, Miss Woodward. Good-night." The speaker shook her unexpectant hand and turned to the station master. "Good-night, Mr. Beers." Then his long stride swung down the platform leaving Hetty with her lips parted ready for the next thing she had prepared to say to him.

"Quite the city man, ain't he?" commented Joel.

Miss Woodward swallowed her disappointment and gathered her dignity about her. "You can see you was slightly mistaken," she said. "He ain't anybody to spank. I'll bet May Ca'line'll be proud of him. He looks like a movie hero."

"Huh!" grunted the other, "I'd like to spank all of them puppets." And he dragged the mail bag away toward its closet.

Miss Woodward moved off with a vague sensation of injured pride. A movie hero would have seen her home, anyway, and probably in a seven-passenger touring car. Well, she had seen him, anyway, and there were no official duties to prevent her running over to the 3:06 to-morrow to see them off, as it would be the Sabbath day.

## CHAPTER IV

### A TÊTE-À-TÊTE SUPPER

**J**OE LAIRD'S face which had set as Hetty's words brought before him the whole situation, slowly relaxed as he stepped off the station platform and moved deeper into the good smells of the summer evening. The silver-white moon began to assume a golden tinge. The air was still. Croaking of frogs and chirping of crickets sounded just as they used to at bedtime in the old days. He thought of Simon Berry and the unpaid grocery bill, and he shuddered to think of what might have happened in the way of escort had he not had presence of mind to assume seven-league boots and leave Miss Woodward far in the rear. So Mrs. Berry had been one of his mother's good angels—the wife of the grocer. He hoped she was not at the house now, extending her friendly offices to helping his mother to meet her son.

He walked faster, thankful for the solitude of his path under the heavily arching trees. As he neared home he whistled, and the mother, standing listening alertly under the stars, cried out, "Joe!" and ran lightly down the rickety steps. She fled along the path and met him at the gate. Joe dropped his bag and for a moment they proceeded no farther; just stood locked in a tight embrace. May Ca'line's head reached no higher than her tall boy's shoulder, and with her cheek against his breast and his resting on her hair, they stood, he, forced by the very strength of her excited, happy sobs

and clinging embrace to wink away his own tears as he laughed.

"Great, is n't it, mother?" he said. "Great, is n't it?" and gulped manfully.

"How — how long will you let me cry, Joe?" she sobbed.

"Why, we have all night, and it's very pleasant out here," he said, holding her close, and patting her little shoulder.

"I — I sort of think, Joe — I think — I have a feeling that this is the happiest moment I shall ever know."

Her boy gave another short laugh, although he felt the significance of her words. "Then you keep it right up, honey," he replied, and there was reverence in the kiss he pressed again upon her forehead. He had received memorable lessons in appreciation of her type of womanhood.

"It's the finest sort of a night," he went on; "the moon is gorgeous and I have n't felt a mosquito yet."

"You're so good, Joe!" The declaration came in jerkily.

"On the contrary, I was just thinking what a cur I'd been not to get out here all winter."

"I won't let you say such things. I understand pretty well, Joe, how full your life is."

"Well, we won't talk about it. We're together now." The young man as he spoke writhed his handkerchief out of a tightly pressed breast pocket and began to lift his mother's head and wipe her eyes. She smiled up at him tremulously in the moonlight.

"I'm yearning for a cup of tea," he said.

"Darling child!" she exclaimed remorsefully. "What am I thinking of!"

She disengaged herself and started to reach for his bag. He caught it up, and with one arm around her led her along the garden path.

"If life were all like this!" she thought, wishing there were some way she could hold back the minutes.

There was a lamp on the dining-room table, which was spread with a red cloth. Half a boiled ham reposed on a platter, a high-piled plate of bread, another of cheese, a dish of jelly, another of butter, gladdened the traveler's eyes; and while he was washing his face and hands his mother brought tea and hot biscuit from the kitchen. They sat down opposite each other, and while Joe devoured the edibles, his mother's eyes devoured him. It was almost too much happiness to have him all to herself, to have food to give him, and to watch him eat it.

"Hetty Woodward met me at the station," he remarked.

"Why, that was nice of her. They're all very kind and interested."

The young man looked up, and met glad eyes and tremulous lips.

"It was shabby of you to eat your supper before I came, mother."

"Oh, I did n't, dear."

"Then why are n't you eating?"

"I'm — I'm looking at you."

Joe smiled. "Little mother!" he said, returning her gaze. For the first time he began to realize the change that the last year had made in her appearance.

He paused in his energetic spreading of the good biscuit. "Who have you been looking at for the last six months that made you forget to eat?"

"Oh, I've been eating, dear!" she declared. She colored under his gaze.

"You've worried yourself to skin and bone," he said abruptly, "and it's my fault."

"Joe!" she ejaculated, "I know I look a bit forlorn; but don't speak of it now, please." She clasped her hands. "I'm as happy just for this minute, as if I'd died and gone to Paradise. Let me have this one perfect time. Let's not speak of one unhappy thing this evening. You're as much mine to-night as you were when they first put you in my arms and lifted me to the seventh heaven. I'm there now. Don't bring me down."

Her voice and gaze were thrilling. Her son swallowed some obstruction. "Then won't you eat with me, mother?" he asked at last. "I wish I was sure I'd have biscuit like this in Paradise."

"Like mother used to make," she returned. "Yes, indeed, I'm going to eat, only I'm slow. You always did like my biscuit." She poured a cup of tea for herself as she spoke.

"That's the real reason I'm taking you home," said Joe, picking up his knife and fork and returning to the attack.

She laughed. "And is n't that wonderful ham, Joe?"

"I never ate better. I'm glad you placed the platter in front of me."

"There's an angel in this village," said Mrs. Laird fervently. "Her name is Martha Berry."

"I—I remember her, of course," returned Joe, several sentences of Simon Berry's letter returning to him with new and vivid understanding.

"She sent me all these delicious things for your supper to-night."

The son looked up, suddenly grave. "Why was that necessary?" he asked.

"My dear — why, Joe," stammered his mother, surprised at his tone, "you know when folks are going away on a journey — when folks are packing, you know how it is — so inconvenient to cook — and — and — everything. I — I did make the biscuit, dear."

Her pleading eyes besought her boy to respect the rule for the evening. He reminded himself that whatever the conditions, they were the result of his own neglect. He tried to smooth out his frown.

"I'm sorry my mother had to receive gifts of this kind," he said, her meager little body seeming to tell him tales her lips would never utter.

"Why, even Elijah was fed by ravens, Joe," she said coaxingly, "and I'm not so good as Elijah."

She smiled at him persuasively and took a mouthful of ham. Simon Berry's bill was on her mind heavily. Joe would have to know about it some day, but not to-night, not this glorious night when she and her boy were together alone.

"Elijah did n't have a son, perhaps," returned Joe gloomily, "and a good thing he did n't, probably." His appetite was gone for all this food offered up by the defrauded and indignant Berrys.

"Now, don't you stop eating, dear. It would hurt Martha's feelings dreadfully if you did n't like the things after she's gone to the trouble. We have to let folks be neighborly, you know, and — we must take gifts in the spirit in which they are offered."

Joe, convicted by his own conscience, had more than a suspicion of the spirit in which these things had been offered, but he made a manful effort to recapture the

zest of a few minutes ago and satisfy those big, anxious eyes across the table.

"You must notice the pansies, Joe," said his mother, and he regarded the broad, shallow dish that graced the center of the board, brimming over with velvety kitten faces in yellow, purple, and white.

"H'm, those a present, too?"

"No, indeed. I raised those and they've been such a joy; but to-day I went out and cut every one. I could n't bear to think of them to-morrow looking for me to come and give them a drink. I thought we'd enjoy them together."

"They're beauties, and no mistake."

"I thought we might take them to the children," said May Ca'line tentatively. "Do you have flowers in your yard?"

Joe smiled and shook his head. "No, only the human ones. Gladys does n't seem to care for gardening and, of course, she's very busy."

The mother winced involuntarily at the name. This boy, this tall man, who had been her baby, belonged to another woman. No matter what illusion she tried to create, or how she tried to turn her back on the facts, another woman owned him; stood nearer to him than his mother.

"You've made such a cozy picture of this table it does n't look here, to-night, as if you were on the point of leaving the old place for good," continued her son. "Excuse me, mother," for the bony little hand across the table suddenly lifted to the quivering mouth and her eyes shone out at him. It was not tender association, it was not regret at leaving the scene of her long sordid battle, that brought the tears, it was Gladys; but she

could n't tell him that. "Of course," he went on remorsefully, "it means a lot for you to give up the old place."

He rose and came around the table to his mother, put his arms about her and drew her head to his breast. She was so happy in his embrace that she did not weep. She clutched his arm.

"I could n't be sorry to go anywhere with you," she said, and he was relieved to feel that she was not crying.

"That's the little mother," he said approvingly, and gave her a parting pat.

"I'm going to put a pansy in your coat, Joe." She rose and selected the handsomest. "I hope you're not through supper," she added as she pinned it in.

"I am and now we're going to wash the dishes," he responded.

"Well, some of them. The girls told me to pile them up and leave them and they'd do these and the breakfast ones together after we had gone."

"What girls?"

"Martha and Hetty. Oh, Joe, what it means to have good friends at such a time! My trunk is all packed and corded, and Martha's lent me a real nice hand-bag, and they fixed this dress for me." The speaker raised her arms the better to show off the dark serge at which Joe frowned thoughtfully. He did n't dare ask if that, too, was a gift. His mother lifted her wavy head and smiled up at him. "I have n't very many clothes, Joe. I hope your friends are n't fashionable people. If they are you'll want to lock me in a back room, out of sight."

"I'm glad you have good friends," he answered gravely, "but I don't like this donation business. No wonder they all think I'm a tramp."

"Now, stop, Joe. They understand. I don't feel one bit superior to Elijah and I'm thankful to the ravens and you must be. Just think how kind they are! Tomorrow they will come and gather up the food and soiled linen and make everything tidy, and lock the house and save me all the bother and expense. I can't be too grateful to them."

"I'm thankful, too," said Joe in a subdued manner. "Sit down, mother, and drink one more cup of tea; then we'll clear away."

"I really have had a great deal of supper," she protested, but he forced her gently down into her chair and she drank a little more tea. Joe spread half a biscuit for her and she smiled deprecatingly with pleasure at his attention, and ate it.

When the food was covered and put away (May Ca'line being very careful not to disturb a bowl of eggs destined for the precious breakfast) and the last dish wiped, mother and son went into the living-room. The moonlight lay there in a broad beam. The lamp Joe carried was scarcely needed, but it enabled him to see more clearly the shabbiness and poverty about him.

His mother read his thought as he set down the lamp and they stood regarding the room.

"Sit down, dear," she said, indicating the rocker with its split covering. Absent-mindedly he obeyed. She drew a smaller chair beside it and, seating herself, took hold of his sleeve. "I can't seem to get close enough to you," she said.

He returned to the realization of her. "Come here, then, you mite," he answered, and took her into his lap. She laughed delightedly and nestled into his arms, her head against his shoulder. The moonlight flowed

generously through the mended curtains, across the slit matting.

"Now, tell me all about yourself, Joe."

"I wish I could stay out here with you a month," was the unexpected reply.

"You do?" she cried joyously. "Would it be possible, dear?"

"Utterly impossible."

"I suppose you'll be surprised to hear that I don't know exactly what your business is, Joe, nor how you live. I have your street number, of course, and I know you're with the X. & Y. Railroad, but sometimes when people ask me, I'm sorry I don't know more detail. I try not to let them suspect it. Of course, it won't matter now because I'll see you every day. Oh, Joe, think of it!" She turned her face in against his coat, torn by the mixed emotion of joy and apprehension.

"You'll soon find that I'm not much to see. I don't believe many men are heroes in their own families. At any rate, I'm not. Life's just a hustle."

The dispirited tone struck some chord in the mother's breast.

"It ought not to be. Life ought to be joy," she said with conviction.

"Well—you know whether it is or not," he responded.

"To-night I know it *is*," she declared, and squeezed him.

"You want to know what I do," said Joe, rocking gently with his light burden. "Whenever I stop to realize it, and look back over the past five years, I know that I'm a lucky beggar; a fool for luck as the

saying is. My marrying at twenty-one and with the salary I was getting was insanity, pure and simple. It was awfully tough for any girl to run up against such a fool. I was one small item in two long rows of clerks in this railroad office and I was getting twenty dollars a week."

"I suppose you were honest with Gladys's parents."

"Yes, I was. They knew and she knew; but I was crazy about her and she thought we could get along, so we took a cheap room, and thought the picnicking and trolley rides were good fun for a while. It was when I found that we were going to have another mouth to feed that I waked up."

May Ca'line gave her boy's arm an understanding pressure.

"It's a wonder to me my hair did n't turn white during the few months along there. I saw no chance of advance. Gladys's people were n't in a position to help us any. Well, the twins were actually born in that little room of ours. Gladys's mother came and stayed with her awhile. I hung on a hook somewhere those weeks, and just as I was finding out how little food a man can live on and setting my teeth to begin to pay on the doctor's bill, my piece of luck happened."

"Dear boy, I'm so glad!"

"One of the high muck-a-mucks of the road had to pass by us in the outer office every day to get to his room. It seems he happened to pick me out of the crowd of hustlers, why, I shall never know; but one day I was told to go to his sanctum. It was one of the days when Gladys was n't so well and when everything at home had combined to make me feel that my place was the river. Well, the high muck-a-muck is a rather stunning-

looking personage. When I went in he turned: 'This is Mr. Laird?' said he, piercing me through and through with his eyes and looking me over from head to foot. 'Sit down, Mr. Laird.' I did so. There was n't any starch in my knees, anyway, and I know I was pale as a ghost. 'I'm afraid you're not well,' said the boss. 'You're not half as afraid as I am,' said I, real bold-like, and I smiled with the courage of despair. 'When you smile it's exact,' said he, looking very interested and a little startled, I thought. In thinking over that first interview afterward I remembered he said that; but at the time I did n't notice. I was having all I could do not to throw myself on my weak knees before him and beg him to lend me a hundred dollars, knowing it would be like a nickel to him. I don't yet know who he meant I was like when I smiled. Sometime I'll ask him."

"Go on, Joe, go *on!*" for the boy seemed lost for the moment in reminiscence. "Did he give you a job, poor darling?"

"He asked why I was afraid. I answered, because I was married; and he said it was absurd for me to be married and I deserved to be afraid; and he laughed and asked how my nurse could have been so careless. I told him that I knew I'd done wrong, but that it was too late to repent now because there were twins. He looked as aghast as I felt for a minute, and then he threw his head back and laughed more heartily than before. I did n't like it. It was hard enough to be harassed and worried and perplexed, without being made to feel ridiculous. I fancy he saw me grow red, and he guessed by my expression how far from a laughing matter it all was to me. He passed his hand over his mouth and sobered up. 'I sent for you,' he said, 'to ask you

how you liked your job. I know now, without your telling me. In fact I have seen for several weeks that you were liking it less and less.'

"A cold chill crept down my back. 'Have I neglected anything, sir?' I asked. He shook his head. 'No; and the fact of this patriarchal condition of yours explains the symptoms I have noticed. I am about to lose my private secretary. You are very young and, of course, very inexperienced, but I've a fancy to try you.' My heart absolutely stood still. It was the most exciting moment of my life. I did n't say a word, but if a man's eyes ever poured out eagerness and gratitude I'm sure mine did.

" 'Where are you living?' he asked next. I told him. 'You'd like to try?' he asked. 'Mr. Breed,' said I, 'if striving will accomplish it I shall learn to fill the place.' 'I believe you will,' he answered. So there," finished Joe, "was my wonderful luck. Why it came, why he picked me out, I don't know any more than you do, unless it really was my resemblance to somebody. You'd better believe I did n't care, either. He was wonderfully kind. He advised against our going into an apartment, because he said a yard was so necessary for children."

"Has he seen the children?"

"Yes, he has seen Gladys and the children once." Joe paused, then continued, "He's a martinet, mother, and the job is no cinch. He has never made any more references to my winning smile, but he knows that I don't leave a stone unturned in the effort to give him satisfaction."

May Ca'line lay very quiet against her boy's heart. "I'm so grateful to him," she said at last; then she

added, "Breed is a common enough name, I suppose. What is your great man's Christian name?"

"He goes back to first principles for his. His name's Adam."

May Ca'line slowly turned her head a little and buried her eyes against her boy's coat. She loved him better than her life; and a prayer of thanksgiving rose from her heart, that, neglected and half-forgotten in her country corner, she had been the instrument of his salvation.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FLITTING

**J**OE LAIRD put the best face he could on the farewell attentions paid to his mother the next day.

According to her directions he gave Mrs. Berry the key to the cottage. Its condition and the furnishings, as the morning light had revealed them, had deepened his sense of the estimation in which he was probably held by the friends to whose charity he owed his breakfast. They were present at the station, and his embarrassment under their eyes took the form of a stiff taciturnity, which caused them to shake their heads when the puffing train had finally left the dusty little station to its Sabbath hush.

The eyes of both women were wet as they stood there alone.

"He's a perfect frog!" declared Hetty Woodward, wiping her eyes vigorously. "He did n't act at all like that last night when I met him. He seemed to appreciate my comin' and he smiled and behaved real human. He's a handsome feller, but as hard as nails."

"'Handsome is as handsome does,'" responded Mrs. Berry, blowing her nose. "May Ca'line's so warm-hearted, it makes me feel real timersome to see her go off with that great big dumb man, and to think she's in his power and leavin' all her friends behind her!"

"But, did n't you notice, she seemed just as gay as common?" returned Hetty with a sniff.

"Oh, well, but you know May Ca'line! If 't was to

the stake, she'd go with that airy manner and all her curls bobbin'. 'This is my boy, and though he looks as if he'd swallowed a knife for breakfast, I'm goin' off to the city with him, and, of course, it could n't be anything but a lark. I hope nobody'll make the mistake of thinkin' I ain't the happiest woman in the world.' That's May Ca'line!"

The station master, having busied himself with the utmost deliberation in certain official duties, now came into view, locked the little building, and approached the two women.

"All over but the shoutin', ain't it?" he remarked agreeably.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Berry; "another Leacock chapter ended."

"I guess we'd all end 'em if we could," said Miss Woodward; "stupid old hole!"

"Oh, cheer up, Hetty," remarked Mr. Beers; "I heerd there's a movie man comin' here to set up a stiddy. He cal'lates to git a lot o' trolley trade."

"He will, too." Miss Woodward's dull eyes sparkled. "Where's it goin' to be, Joel?"

"Oh, that's tellin'," he returned.

"Hard work, too, when you don't know, ain't it?" remarked Mrs. Berry good-naturedly. "Come on, Hetty, you'll probably see all about it in to-morrow's 'Eagle.'"

Meanwhile mother and son were speeding along in the beginning of May Ca'line's new chapter. She wished the trip could last four days instead of four hours. She cast little covert glances at the regular profile beside her. Her boy was very grave and quiet. She tried to think of everything she might afterward

wish she had said to him while he was all her own. Her instinct told her that she should seldom see him alone hereafter.

"Are you thinking of very important things?" she asked at last.

Joe started and smiled down at her. "Not a bit of it," he answered cheerfully. As a matter of fact he was determining to send back a first payment to Simon Berry to-morrow.

"I was wondering, Joe, if Mr. — if your boss, as you call him, knew that you were coming to Leacock to get your mother."

"Yes; when I asked for the day off I told him."

"It's a wonder to me he stays in the city now warm weather has begun."

"He does n't. He has a wonderful place up in the country, but he motors in every day."

"His family out there?" asked May Ca'line tentatively.

"Well, naturally," returned Joe, and, exasperating male creature that he was, said no more.

"Who are there in his family?" came the question after a short silence, during which the young man's thoughts had gone far afield.

"Whose?"

"In Mr. — Mr. Breed's family."

Joe laughed. "What a bump of curiosity!"

His mother averted her head a little and looked out of the window. "I'm sure it's natural I should be interested in the man who gives you your living and — and especially when I realize that you know all his secrets." May Ca'line smiled demurely at the flying landscape.

"He does n't give me my living by a long chalk. I earn every cent of it."

"Of course you do, dear; but who did you say was in his family?"

"Why, there's an invalid son, and a daughter that's a peach, and servants — well, I tumble over a new one every time I go out there."

"You do go out there, then. How nice of the — the boss. Do Gladys and the children go?"

Joe smiled. "Scarcely. I go when he needs me. Sometimes he dictates to me in the motor."

"Oh. Is his — is his wife pleasant?"

"I presume so, because she's been with the heavenly host a long time."

"Joe! Why, Joe Laird!"

"Well, I never saw her. She died before my time. You must come into the office and see Mr. Breed some day."

"Not for the world!" replied May Ca'line with such frightened emphasis that her son looked down at her.

"He does n't bite," he remarked, "though he comes pretty near it sometimes."

"He does n't come to your house, does he?" The question was apprehensive.

"He came once; but he never seemed to care to repeat the dose." The same shadow fell on the speaker's eyes which his mother had noticed at his first mention of that visit.

"I hope he never will," she exclaimed earnestly. "Everybody knows it does n't work well to try to mix business and friendship."

Joe Laird's laugh burst forth spontaneously.

"What's so funny about that?" demanded his mother.

"Oh, it is funny, awfully funny," her boy assured her. "I don't know that self-made men are always hard, but Adam Breed is hard, little mother, hard as nails — with occasional surprising soft spots. When it comes to talking about social relations between us, you don't know what a joke that is. The Breeds have a stunning town house, and a great country place among hills and lakes, a regular estate, and their friends are the same sort as themselves."

"Well, how did he happen to come once to your house?"

"I think he wanted to see my wife and children, to tell the truth, although he made another errand."

"Did n't he think the children were dear little things?"

"He did n't say. He took them both up on his lap and was as nice as he could be to them. I told you there was an occasional soft spot there."

Joe's smile had departed. There was evidently some memory of his employer's visit which bore a sting.

"His daughter's quite a wonderful girl. She comes into the office sometimes to see her father. She's a looker and dresses marvelously. Gladys keeps tab on her gowns as they are described in the papers, but she does n't hear of the plain tailored things I see her in and wish every woman could afford." The speaker sighed unconsciously.

His mother sighed too, a breath of excitement, interest, and relief.

"Oh, I hope you'll always stay poor, Joe, so that they won't come," she said naively.

"Well, I fancy Mr. Breed'll see to that. I'm hoping he'll loosen up at the new year. I'm due to have a raise, but I suppose it won't come until then."

"I'm sure you do very faithful work, Joe."

The young man shook his head. "I leave no stone unturned to make myself absolutely necessary to the governor. I try to be his memory and his right hand, always to be at his elbow when he needs me and invisible when he does n't."

"It sounds like a game, dear."

"Of course it's a game; all life is."

"Oh, I don't think so, Joe. I would n't call it that. Life is a — well, a service as I see it. The more unselfish we can make it, the better."

Her boy smiled and shrugged. "What's in a name? All I know is I have to hustle to make ends meet and I wish the governor would give me a little more rope."

His mother made no reply to this. She knew he had no intention of making any trying implication to her; but his words brought her back face to face with the present situation. Soon, now, she would be going into his little home, to infringe upon Gladys's space and add to her expenses; all because there was no alternative.

"As soon as I get stronger," she said to herself, "I will try to get something to do. I'm not an old woman."

When the lump in her throat grew almost too insistent to be swallowed, she reflected stoutly on the tale her boy had told her of his desperation and deliverance. If only they could know that it was to her they owed the fact that the twins were possessed of a yard and a sand-pile, even Gladys might not grudge her a corner in their house; but they could never know, because they could not look at her without ridiculing her conviction; and the thought of Joe laughing at her with his young wife, behind her back, brought the biggest lump of all.

It was late supper-time when the travelers reached home. Gladys, a set smile on her face, opened the door to them and offered her cheek to her mother-in-law's kiss. After that ceremony she seemed at a loss what to do.

"Give mother a chance to wash her face, Gladys, and then give us something to eat in a hurry. I'm starved and she probably is. All we've had since breakfast is a sandwich."

"Oh, I thought you would eat on the train," said Gladys coldly. "Would you like to come upstairs, Mrs. Laird?"

"Why, of course she would," returned Joe, flushing. "Where's Nora?"

"Gone out, of course. This is Sunday."

"Surely. Well, you take mother up and I'll see what Nora has left us."

A little sick feeling crept round May Ca'line's heart, but she followed Gladys up the stairs to a small room with one window, that had hitherto been used for sewing and extras in general.

"I hope you won't mind my leaving the sewing-machine in here," Gladys said. "There does n't seem to be any other place for it. This is such a little box of a house."

May Ca'line seemed to hear Martha Berry's sonorous exhortation to begin as she could go on; but she was swamped by the current of her feelings and could n't trust her voice to do more than assent.

This plump young person, with the cold, bold eyes and large silver buckles on her shoes, had an air of combined power and martyrdom.

"Where are the children?" ventured the visitor. To see somebody small and weak would be reassuring.

"In bed. I get them out of the way early. They're tired enough by six o'clock. Come down when you are ready." And the hostess moved away, closing the door after her.

Not a word of welcome. No solicitude for her comfort. May Ca'line's worst apprehensions were realized. She bit her lip hard. It was difficult enough for Joe. She must rise above it.

She washed her face at the stand, dashing the cool water on her hot eyes where tears were pressing.

There was another door to her room and beyond it she now heard a murmur of voices, soft at first, then a vigorous slap responded to by a loud "You stop!" announced to her that her grandchildren were her neighbors. She dried her hands and face and walked across the room, catching up the pansies on the way. She opened the door slowly until she saw twin beds, a child sitting up in each and two pairs of brown, round, unsmiling eyes fixed upon her. As she advanced she smiled timidly, but no response was awakened.

"I'm your grandma, dears," she said softly and held out the pansies. As soon as she was near enough Bob snatched them and tried to hold them out of his sister's reach. She promptly threw herself against him, and a tangle of arms and legs, pulled hair and cries ensued.

"Hush, dears, oh, please do!" cried May Ca'line in distress. "Let me have the flowers and we'll divide them evenly."

Bob, feeling himself getting worsted, threw the bouquet in the visitor's direction, and she caught it and sat down on the edge of his bed.

"I want all of the yellow ones," announced Ella.

"So do I," declared Bob crossly.

"They're all pretty," said their grandmother. "See their little kitten-faces? They grew in my yard in the country and they thought they'd like to come to town."

Both children watched her with a gloomy and curious gaze as she untied the stems.

"You're poor, that's why you had to come here and take mother's sewing-room," remarked Ella, who, it quickly appeared, was the leading spirit.

"We knew you would n't bring us anything," added Bob. "You're too poor to buy toys."

May Ca'line's beating heart ached under a calm exterior. She knew the worst now, that even these children had been taught contempt. Mrs. Berry's words echoed in her ears. She was not a Daughter of the Revolution for nothing. Her spirit was at bay. Come what may she determined not to "meech."

"Nonsense," she said calmly. "Have n't I brought you these flowers? Did you ever try to buy any at a greenhouse? They cost a lot of money there. There's exactly half for each of you, after throwing away the poor little things you hit in the nose."

Ella laughed. "Hit in the nose," she repeated; "they have n't any noses."

"Of course they have." May Ca'line indicated the velvet feature. "Now are you going to kiss your grandma before I go down to supper?"

The twins, clutching their flowers close, and casting jealous and suspicious glances each on the other's bunch lest the division be unequal, submitted to being kissed, and just as they did this their father appeared in the doorway. Glad cries ascended in which the greeting to his mother was lost. She rose and stood away from the bed watching her boy toss the next

generation as high toward the ceiling as his long arms permitted. It gave some balm to her sore heart to see the antics of the three together.

Finally the adored daddy put them back in their beds in spite of their loudly expressed reluctance. "That's the way this little grandma of yours used to toss me," he said, throwing an arm around his mother.

The children looked at her incredulously, as her curly head reached just to their big father's shoulder.

"She could n't toss you," declared Bob.

"Yes, she could, and spank me, too," he laughed, squeezing the little shoulder beside him, an act which administered more balm. "Was n't she a good little grandma to bring you those flowers?" for the children began to pick up the scattered blossoms.

"They're kittens," remarked Ella.

"Sure thing," agreed their father. "Go to sleep now, both of you. Come, mother, we've scared up some cold meat and bread and butter and Gladys is waiting for us to have a cup of tea."

In silence May Ca'line went with him.

"Tired, are n't you?" he said kindly.

"Yes, I am, Joe, a little. It's — this is all very exciting to a stay-at-home, you know."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REVELATION

GLADYS was waiting. Sundry unusually peremptory remarks from Joe had caused her to sit at the head of her table and serve his mother, but every bite the guest took threatened to choke her.

"You have a very pleasant dining-room," she said unsteadily.

"Nothing is pleasant in the city at this time of year," replied Gladys. "If Joe had an employer with any heart he'd take some interest in our getting into the country for at least a month. He knows that Joe has children, but a lot he cares."

"The children seem strong and well," said Mrs. Laird; "I've just been talking with them."

"I'm sorry they were n't asleep," returned Gladys, her sullen tone conveying a broad implication.

Her husband met her eyes with a grave glance; but he spoke lightly. "You might have known they would stay awake for me. I tell you, mother, I'm solid with those kiddies."

A sick, qualm stole through his mother's heart. If these two should ever quarrel before her and because of her she could not bear it. She would run away. She forced a faint smile. "I saw that," she returned. "They are fine children."

"They're awfully troublesome," said Gladys. "It's all very well for Joe, who sees them just morning and evening. I guess if he was in my place, their bedtime

would be the most interesting moment in the day to him as it is to me."

"My poor boy! My poor boy," thought May Ca'line, "you're paying!"

A wave of intense sympathy for him steadied her voice. "I'm so tired I'm stupid," she said, "and I believe I shall have to go to bed." She moved her chair back from the table. "One thing you have n't encountered yet, Gladys, is taking stock of your belongings, the accumulation of years in an old house, and moving out."

"You must have hated to do it," said Gladys. All her remarks to her mother-in-law were made with lowered eyes.

"I did," returned Mrs. Laird. "It was the hardest thing I ever did."

"Well, you have to thank Joe for it. He will never let well enough alone."

"For Joe's sake, for Joe's sake," repeated the guest mentally as she rose.

"You'll have to excuse me, dear," she said, coming to her son's side and pressing her hand on his shoulder as he started to rise. "Finish your supper, and, Gladys, you stay with him." (Gladys had made no move to do anything else.) "It is still light enough for me to find everything I need in my room and I noticed where the matches were."

"Yes, of course we have no electricity," said Gladys, "and the gas is miserable."

"Good-night, both of you," said the mother, still keeping a firm little hand on Joe's shoulder. Her boy's upturned look met hers and now Gladys's gaze was not lowered. Her large, bold eyes were fixed upon mother

and son. May Ca'line instantly perceived their jealousy and suspicion and knew instinctively that they would be watching henceforth.

"Do as I say, Joe," she said quietly. "Don't come upstairs. Good-night."

He understood why she did not stoop and kiss him. He turned his head and touched his lips to the toil-worn hand which was quickly withdrawn, and the mother with misty eyes, but head held high, moved out of the room and upstairs.

When she had gone Gladys braced herself for reproaches. She was quite aware that she had broken every law of hospitality; but her husband surprised her by continuing to eat and drink mechanically and in silence. Very well, so much the better. She had behaved honestly and as she intended to continue to do, so, if he were going to be reasonable and unexacting and make no fuss, so much the better. She poured a fresh cup of tea for herself and offered Joe one.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said, and she spoke quite light-heartedly. She felt that the opening scene of her mother-in-law's residence had been very satisfactory. She had let her see the perfunctory state of her own feelings and made a beginning from which she could go on and "serve her right." Joe was not going to complain of it. He was already engrossed, as often happened, in some business problem. "A penny for your thoughts," she said again.

He looked up then and met her eyes. They were very good-looking eyes in this mood of self-satisfaction.

"It would take a much cleverer man than I," he said, "to put my thoughts into words."

His gaze clung to her with a sort of fascination. For

the last two years he had been industriously building a curtain over what he might think of his wife if he did not love her and if she were not the mother of his children. Such careful work as he had put into that curtain! Such watchful assiduity to seal up each tiny crack which threatened to betray a part of what lay behind it! Now, in this last half-hour the curtain had been totally rent away. Every tiniest disgust and disappointment of his married life seemed to gather in a mighty force which was shattering; and the actual verdict of his brain and the genuine throb of his heart proclaimed themselves. Instinctively he braced himself against the horror of the revelation. A physical weakness mastered him from head to foot. His life was a ruin. Even the thought of his children offered no consolation. They were victims, too. They would never rise above the coarseness of their blood and training.

"Why, Joe, you look deadly white!" exclaimed Gladys. "What is the matter, Joe? Is it the heat?"

She rose and came around to him. He put up his hands defensively. "If you just won't touch me, please," he said gently, "I — I'll get over it. I — I — need air."

A sharp shower in the afternoon had caused the windows to be closed. Gladys, thoroughly frightened, hastened to open them. She seized a palm-leaf fan from the sideboard and stood beside her husband, fanning him. His gasping for breath lessened. Color began to come back into his face. At last he smiled wanly.

"Funny — your fanning me, is n't it?"

"Yes, but what was it, Joe?" asked his wife anxiously.

"Do you think it was your heart?"

"Yes, yes, I think so. Don't take any notice, Gladys.

Just let me be alone for a little while. I'll go in the other room." He rose slowly.

"But I can't let you be alone when you're ill." Gladys began to have uncomfortable doubts and stirring wonder as to whether the incidents of her mother-in-law's installation had been entirely successful after all. If this attack had any relation to herself, Joe was behaving very queerly about it. On the other hand, if there was anything the matter with his heart, he would be making that an excuse for not dancing. She did n't know which explanation would be more disagreeable.

Whatever the cause of the attack, her husband's drawn, white face attested to its severity. She watched him rise from the table like an old man, holding to its edge for support, and move slowly toward the living-room. Impulsively she took a step forward to follow. He motioned her back.

"No, please," he said. "Sorry I can't help you clear away. I'll lie down a bit."

As he disappeared Gladys stood still and listened. He had spoken gently to her, but if he went upstairs it would be because he felt that his mother needed consolation and then she would understand that a storm had merely been postponed. Postponed by what? Did Joe really have a weak heart? Her brows drew together and she listened intently. No footstep on the stairs. All was still. She relaxed and began clearing off the table, taking the dishes to the kitchen and piling them for Nora to wash in the morning; and as she moved she cogitated. If Joe really had anything the matter with his heart, what a nuisance it would be. He would n't dance, and her life would be duller than ever.

Some thought suddenly curved her pouting lips and softened her eyes. She wondered if Joe would let her go to dances with another man. She stood still with a cup in each hand and considered the possibility. Her gaze into space hardened. Joe was getting to be more of a kill-joy every day. Henry Bird was always jolly; always in for a lark. All the girls were getting to be half-afraid of Joe. As Henry said, Joe had no sense of humor. How comical and witty Henry had been, calling Joe "Deacon Laird." Probably Joe would be furious if he knew it. "Poor Henry." Gladys set down the cups and sighed as she breathed the words.

"Henry says my face is like a rose set in velvet night," she reflected. "Why can't men always stay lovers! I believe they could and would," she muttered, clashing the silver together impatiently, "if it was n't for money."

Her face softened. "A commercial traveler like Henry has it pretty slick. The use of a car when he's in town and expenses paid everywhere."

A faint click from the front of the house arrested her reflections. The front door! Who could have come in? She had warned Henry —

She hurried out of the kitchen through the dining-room and into the living-room. It was empty. The gas had not been lighted. The pillows on the divan were tumbled. Joe had been lying there. She went out into the hall. His hat was gone. She looked uncertainly up the stairs, then back at the hat rack. All was still above. He had gone out. Well, he had said he needed air.

Gladys went into the living-room and sat down among the tumbled cushions. Her heart was astir

with the momentary fear that the commercial traveler had broken in upon Joe's siesta; coming in without ringing. There would have been a scene.

"Why does n't Joe ever make a fuss over me any more?" she thought, defensively, querulous tears moistening her eyes. "Why does he hardly ever kiss me, or take any interest in anything? And now if he's going to be an invalid on top of everything else!"

Her sullen eyes, gazing at the rug, saw again the scene of the tea-table. Mother and son so alike in feature, so alike in the suggestion of finely organized humanity. "Not your kind," suggested some inner voice. "No, indeed, not my kind," was the stout retort, "and I'm glad I'm different; but he's mine. Joe's mine. The girls are half-afraid of him, but they always say he seems like a swell, even though he is only a poor secretary. If I go out without him now, though, he'll have his mother; and if he consented to my going out it would probably be so he could visit alone with her." The black eyes grew gloomy under this consideration. "No, sir, if they got a chance to band against me it would be good-night. She'd little by little get her foot in and in a little while I would n't be mistress in my own house. I know her kind."

These astute reflections were punctuated by a wide yawn. "If Henry knew I was sitting here alone in the dark like this there'd be something doing." With this Gladys rose and struck a match and looked at the clock.

"It's ten and I'm sleepy. I wish Joe'd come in. I wonder what in the world he's doing."

What Joe Laird was doing was keeping his mind fixed on one consideration and that one his mother.

His despair frightened him into the nearly irresistible longing to step out of his problem forever. He plodded miles putting up a fight against a temptation so overwhelming that at moments he was breathless and gasped chokingly. His home — he hated it. His own room, the bed he must sleep in, the thought was suffocating. His children weighed as nothing. One figure alone kept drawing him back to the purpose to live, to the same knowledge that like thousands before him he should fit his back to the burden and continue to work and sleep in his ruined world. That patient face, strangely girlish and appealing through its lines of care and deprivation, followed him with its eyes of love, and again, as unconsciously as before, May Ca'line came to the rescue of her son.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECRETARY

**G**LADYS did not hear her husband come in, but his mother did.

She was sitting on the edge of her couch in the art-kimono bestowed upon her from Hetty Woodward's wardrobe. She was still tremulous, but not weeping.

For Joe's sake. For Joe's sake. How far would that slogan carry her, support her? Her one window was now opened wide, but there seemed no air to admit. She rose and set the door into the hall ajar. That was why she heard Joe come in, for his entrance was nearly noiseless. She listened for his foot on the stair. If only she might catch him in passing and feel his arms around her once; yet that would never do. He might speak, and Gladys's room was next. Nevertheless, the mother listened wistfully for the dear step. She waited and waited, but it did not come. Joe perhaps was reading.

The opened door had created a little draught and she threw off the kimono, glad that among her other troubles she could not see its yellow dragons; and comforted by the cooler breath of air, she lay back on her pillow and soon fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

Almost immediately, as it seemed to her, she heard the loud voices of children, and wakened dazed. It was daylight. For a minute she could not place her surroundings, but turning her head her eye caught the flaming red of the kimono and its dragons grinned at her. She felt it cruel of them in the heat. She turned

her face into the pillow and strove with herself. She prayed for strength for this day and all the days. In spite of being wakened by them from needed sleep, the voices of the children touched her. They were Joe's children. They must love her. She must love them.

She rose and closed her door and bathed at the stand Gladys had arranged, lest the guest should interfere in the bathroom. At last, dressed, she opened the door of the nursery. The children, sitting up in their twin beds, ceased their play and stared at her unsmiling.

"Where's daddy?" demanded Ella, after the moment of surprise.

"Yes, where's daddy? We don't want you," said Bob.

May Ca'line's fatigue seemed greater than on the day before. "Does daddy come in every morning?" she asked in a feeble voice.

"Of course he does. Where is he?" roared Bob.

"I suppose he's dressing. Don't you?" The little grandmother sat down on the edge of the nearest bed. "Perhaps he's splashing around in the bathtub. Do you splash around every morning?"

"No," returned Ella scornfully; "we don't have to every day."

"Mother dresses us and then we wash our face," said Bob. "I hate soap."

"I hate cold water," added Ella.

"What do you like?" asked May Ca'line rather dejectedly.

"The movies," replied Bob.

"And the sand-pile," added Ella.

"You must show me the sand-pile," said their guest. "I like to dig, too."

This suggested caution to Ella, who was of a calculating turn. "We only have two shovels," she remarked.

"Where's daddy? Where's daddy?" yelled Bob, throwing the sheet from him.

"How would you like me to dress you, so you can go and find him?"

This idea, rather to May Ca'line's surprise, found favor, and in another minute she was putting small stockings and shoes on the restless feet and was just inserting Ella's legs into her rompers when Gladys, in a rumpled pink negligee, appeared, from the next room. Her hanging hair was tangled, her eyes heavy with heat and sleep.

She addressed the guest. "I wish you'd leave your door into the hall open when you go out of the room," she said. "I've been standing there knocking. I thought you must be sleeping the sleep of the dead."

She advanced and took the rompers out of May Ca'line's hand. "That is n't what I want her to wear this morning," she said. "I wish you would n't dress the children, please."

"Ouch!" shouted Bob crossly as his mother jerked him away from his grandmother's side. "Where's daddy?"

"How should I know?" responded Gladys in her sleepy, nasal, morning voice. "Has n't he been in?" She cast a quick glance at her mother-in-law. She was a little earlier than usual this morning, for it had occurred to her last night, as she was retiring, that Joe would have to go through his mother's room for the daily frolic with the babies, in which she had hitherto taken no further interest than that it gave her a little more time for her morning nap.



Helen M. Grose.

"I WISH YOU WOULD N'T DRESS THE CHILDREN, PLEASE"



She knew what that would mean. Mrs. Laird, doubtless used to the early hours of the country, would have a daily *tête-à-tête* with Joe, and, of course, breakfast with him. She looked now at May Ca'line suspiciously. "Have you had your breakfast?"

"No." The guest stood, her hands dropped at her side.

"Have you seen Joe?"

"No."

"Funny he has n't been in here. Get *up*, Ella! Can't you see I can't fix your garter if you twist around like that?"

At this juncture Nora, the maid, appeared in the doorway. She gave a swift, appraising look at the new member of the family.

"Children, yer father told me to tell ye he was in such a hurry this mornin' he could n't come in to see ye."

The various noises which the twins emitted to signify their displeasure at this information cannot be conveyed on the printed page.

"Hush, oh, *hush!*" exclaimed Gladys, shaking the unlucky Bob, who happened to be under her hands at that moment. "Keep still, both of you!" — for he began to cry and Ella stamped with all her force.

"Nora, you take the children down and give them and Mrs. Laird their breakfast. Keep the coffee hot for me."

Nora took a hand of each twin, and their grandmother followed in silence.

When they reached the dining-room, Nora gave another look of appraisal at the guest. The last thing Mr. Laird had said on leaving this morning was, "Take good care of my mother, won't you, Nora?" The warm-hearted Irish girl adored the young master of the house.

and she did n't begrudge any extra work which the presence of his mother might necessitate; but she had somehow expected a big, imposing woman who would be able to hold her own with the mistress, and she had looked forward with some anticipation to the rows that were likely to add to the gayety of life. This little woman with the girlish figure, wavy hair, and care-worn face, destroyed her mental picture and roused her compassion.

"She won't have no chance here," was her decision.

"Would ye sooner have toast, mum?" she asked the guest, when the twins were seated in their high chairs before their bowls of oatmeal, and her tone was so kind that May Ca'line looked up at her gratefully.

"Thank you, I like the corn bread very much."

Nora hovered over the visitor solicitously, diverted occasionally by the necessity to slap a twin's marauding hand.

"Everything's very nice, Nora," said May Ca'line at last, "but I'm too tired as yet to eat much. I've been moving, you know."

"But one more cup of coffee'll be good for ye, mum, and Mr. Laird would be pleased."

May Ca'line looked up again, surprised and grateful. The kind Irish face warmed her sick heart.

"It's very good of you, Nora, not to be sorry I've come," she said. "It makes you more work and I'd love to help you — only — perhaps —"

Nora horrified the speaker by sending down a prodigious wink. "Sure, I know," she said with a nod. "Don't ye fret, Mrs. Laird. It's me that likes workin' fer a *lady*."

May Ca'line bit her lip at the emphasis. This was

awful. A servant speaking thus of Joe's wife. Poor Joe! Dear Joe!

"Now, don't mind about yer room, either. Take yer rest. Ye look destroyed wid all ye've been through. I'll do yer room."

"Oh, no, indeed," returned the little woman hastily. "That would never do. I mean that I like to do it. I prefer it."

"P'r'aps yer right, mum," agreed Nora knowingly. "Shut up, Ella! Don't ye hear me talkin'?"

"I'm mad at daddy," announced Bob. His voice gave promise of being a basso profundo later on, while Ella's went through the head like a piccolo.

"Does he" — began the visitor, addressing Nora, but turning at once to the children, — "does daddy go away sometimes without coming in to see you?"

"No," they shouted in concert. "I'm going to shoot him," announced Bob, to which filial announcement Ella added, "And I'll pull his hair, I will." She began to beat her glass with a spoon, which striking her brother as a good idea he chimed in with his own, both of them adding inarticulate vocal obbligatos of such volume that May Ca'line involuntarily lifted a hand to the ear nearest them.

"Tormints!" ejaculated Nora. "Is it Injuns ye are to make yer grandma deaf? Out wid ye!" She untied their bibs and they stamped away through the kitchen to their perennial joy, the sand-pile.

May Ca'line cast an apprehensive glance toward the door by which Gladys was likely at any moment to enter. She felt that her time was short.

"How — how was my son — how was Mr. Laird this morning?"

"He's kind o' pinched lookin' this hot weather. He must feel the heat a good deal, mum, or he would n't 'a' slept downstairs."

"Why, Nora, what makes you think he did?"

"I heerd him go up airly to take his tub; and he was n't jokin' at breakfast the way he does be with me always. I thought he was n't well, mebbe."

Nora did not reveal the conclusion of her thought, that some quarrel had arisen with her mistress on account of his mother's arrival. When she discovered the personality of that mother, the whole situation aroused what she was wont to term her "Irish"; and Mr. Laird's last words gained her hearty allegiance.

"Oh —" May Ca'line looked paler and her hands pressed together in her lap. Her diagnosis agreed with that of the maid. "Does Mrs. Laird usually have breakfast with her husband?"

"Oh, niver," responded Nora. "Ye'll be havin' some nice visits with him mebbe whin ye get the ways o' the house."

"I'm — I'm very sorry that he did n't look well."

"Sure, don't be frettin', mum. He's young and strong. We've a bit of a porch and a hammock, p'r'aps ye noticed, and he was n't bad off if he slep' in the hammock."

May Ca'line said nothing. What should this good-natured Irish girl know of her crushing harassment?

"He told me be good to ye, before he wint," said Nora, instinctively administering comfort.

The mother looked up with more life in her troubled eyes. "I'm glad he left a message," she said. "I have a good boy, Nora."

"'Deed, that's what ye have, mum. Only fer him,

I'd be out o' this long ago. I'd work my fingers to the bone fer Mr. Laird."

Meanwhile the object of her loyalty had arrived at his desk in the anteroom of his employer's sanctum. As he passed through the outer office many pairs of eyes followed him enviously. Laird had a soft snap, was the universal verdict.

He sat down at the desk and began sorting and opening the mail. Soon the handle of the door turned. Mr. Breed might have granted him a longer leave of absence. He was not particularly anxious to see that gray-mustached glass of fashion and mould of form from whom he received his salary; that immobile, strong face which concealed the perfect mechanism of a famous business brain.

He absorbed himself more fully. Mr. Breed occasionally failed to accost him as he passed through, and Joe hoped he would do so this time.

A scent of violets stole faintly across the summer air. The secretary became aware that whoever had entered had not advanced. He had occasionally discouraged the catapult-like interruption of an office boy, but the opposite extreme of hesitation was equally irritating.

He turned suddenly. A laughing girl-face met him, the face whose dimples he knew very well. The visitor was dressed in a white costume which managed to be both crisp and clinging. Her hat was veiled in white. She was fresh as Aurora and the infinite soreness within Joe's breast beat at the encounter with her sparkling eyes.

He sprang to his feet, but did not advance.

"Beg pardon, Miss Vivian," he said, unsmiling.

"What for?" she asked gayly.

"I don't know whether your father has come."

"I do know that he has n't; but he will be here in a few minutes. He drove in unusually early this morning and I came in with him to do a few errands."

She paused and the secretary, seeing that she expected an answer, spoke again. "He is usually later," he said rather stiffly. He crossed to the door of the sanctum and opened it.

The girl stood still. "I'm afraid you have a headache, Mr. Laird," she said gently, scrutinizing his pale face.

"Oh, no, not at all, not at all," he rejoined hastily, hating himself for his dullness, but the very soul within him stiff with repugnance and misery. This cool, charming apparition had no part in his world, nor could even understand it. He beheld suddenly the mental image of the home from which she had just emerged. He stood holding the door open and the dimple sank again in her cheek.

"Why do you want to shut me up in there?" she asked.

He dropped his hold on the door handle and made a rather poor essay at a smile.

"Far be it from me," he returned. "May I offer you the hospitality of my electric fan?"

"Indeed you may." She sank into the chair he placed in the breeze, and again it seemed as if there might be violets growing around the desk. He took his own chair again and awaited the next remark. His taciturnity seemed to pique her. She had known him as an easily responsive and rather merry soul on the few occasions when her father's exigencies had brought

him to their home and she had shown him some trifling courtesy; but until the first wound of his tragic awakening should cease its acute pain, any contact with the world of refinement, from which he was shut out forever, caused him anguish. No one could have come into the office this morning so unwelcome as this favorite *débutante* of the season, fresh from the society columns.

"Ferdy was asking the other day when you were coming up again," she said. "Ferdy seemed to take a great fancy to you."

"I hope he is better." Joe's reply was automatic.

"Yes, of course, we tell ourselves every day that he improves." The gay light faded from the girl's face. "It is so hard to be sure in chronic cases. It's dreadful for daddy, you can understand. His only son." The speaker caught her lips under her pretty teeth, and through Joe's stiff armor crept the realization that beauty, money, and envied smartness could not keep the heart from aching.

"I'm sorry," he returned. "I knew he was confined to a chair, but I did n't know what was the matter."

"Nor any one else. Doctors say that nervous troubles are capricious and baffling. Ferdy's spine seems affected. Now his eyes trouble him a great deal and that is the greatest trial of all. I feel as if I were wicked sometimes to ride and swim and dance and play tennis and golf when he, a boy, has more right to be doing all these things."

The appealing expression of the girl's eyes as she said this, as though she longed for comfort, was flattering.

"I'm sure you are a tonic to your brother just because you do all these things. You bring so much of the world to him."

The girl's face slowly cleared as the two pairs of eyes remained fixed in a mutual gaze. Her color deepened in the silence that followed. She wanted to understand his mood. She saw that he was either unhappy or bored, and instinctively she felt that he was not the sort of man to be bored. He had too firm a chin; too much initiative. He was too young. She wished she knew him better. He had had a singular attraction for her each time she had met him, although in her rushed life she forgot him between times. Now, as she regarded him, she determined not to forget him. He looked tired, even haggard. Perhaps he did n't have play enough. She wondered if he had plenty of friends. Her next question was a surprise. "Have you always lived here, Mr. Laird?"

"No, I came from a little country town when I was a youngster, like thousands of other youngsters, to seek my fortune in the city. I was n't barefooted and I had more than a dime in my pocket; so, of course, I shall never be a millionaire."

She laughed; then grew very serious.

"Do you have plenty of fun?" she asked, and her wistful naïveté was very gentle and engaging.

He recognized the implication that he looked as if he needed it, and tried to assume a light air.

"Your father's secretary should not be a frivolous person," he replied.

She shook her head. "Father works people too hard; I know it," she said.

"Himself included," added Joe.

"Oh, yes, I suppose father is quite wonderful. Everybody says so."

Her companion made no response to this and she continued to regard him thoughtfully. He was so very good-looking! So presentable in every way. She wondered — and while she was wondering the door opened again and Adam Breed came in. He cast a quick glance from one to the other of the quiet young people, and his secretary's impassive face underwent no change of expression as he rose and stood.

"Good-morning, Laird. Now, then, Vivian." He held open the inner door and she smiled at Joe: "Thank you for your hospitality, Mr. Laird." She passed out of sight and her father turned to his secretary.

"The old story, Laird. She has come to hold me up. I'll see you in a few minutes." Then he followed his daughter and closed the door.

Joe sat down, his elbows on the desk and his head in his hands. All of it: the whiteness, the gentleness, the refinement, gone. Gone as irrevocably from him as that evanescent scent of violets.

Many times that day he heard again the music of the solicitous girlish voice, uttering its unconscious irony: "Do you have plenty of fun?"

## CHAPTER VIII

ADAM BREED

VIVIAN sat down in the chair beside her father's desk. Joe Laird had said to his mother that the hard man with whom he earned his daily bread had his soft spots, and the expression with which he now regarded his daughter betrayed that she was responsible for at least one of them. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes were distrait.

"Well, then," he began, seating himself and pulling his check-book forward, "what does the insatiable one require to-day? Are n't your bills enough for you?"

"What? Oh, yes. I don't have bills everywhere, you see." Her reply was dreamy, her gaze still abstracted.

Mr. Breed asked no further. He wrote a check, tore it off, and pushed it toward her.

"You're a big girl, now, Vivian; a grand society lady in fact. It's time you stopped asking your dad for money. Why have n't you wanted your own bank account?"

The girl's gaze returned to her father. "Because if I let you allowance me you would find out how extravagant I am. It was all very well at college, but when I came out into the land of clothes and functions I felt it was much safer to rely on your generosity. Poor daddy, you're an angel. Have n't I led you a chase all winter?"

"I don't know. I've had a good many assistant chaperons."

"Yes, indeed." Vivian nodded her head wisely. "As if I did n't know that some of them would accept a permanent position."

"What's this? My small daughter becoming suspicious and cynical?"

"Oh, not so bad as that. I have very good eyes, though, and I think, myself, that my dad's a charmer."

"What's the matter? Is n't the check big enough?"

Vivian laughed and put it in her purse. "No, it's not flattery. I'm getting to be a connoisseur of men, that's all, and I've decided that my daddy is the top of the heap."

Adam Breed, his hands folded on the desk, had given himself up to watching her piquant freshness. "I see that bank account has got to be a whopper," he remarked. "Well, I have n't seen any girl that eclipses you either. Come, now, is n't that handsome?"

"I should n't be jealous if you did, daddy." Vivian's eyes rested upon him with the same wistfulness with which a few minutes ago she had regarded his secretary. "You've been alone so many years — and have been so splendid."

Her father smiled. "Alphonse and Gaston have nothing on us," he said. "What is this? A tournament of pretty speeches? What are you leading up to? What do you want so badly?"

"Nothing," replied Vivian, with unnecessary warmth of denial and a rush of color over cheek and brow. "I'm sincere."

Her father sighed. "My dear, if you can always blush like that there will be no end to your social success."

"I'm not blushing," protested Vivian. "You should

not tease in such warm weather." Then, with a determined rush, "Did you notice, daddy, how pale Mr. Laird is?"

"Can't say I did, my dear."

"Oh, I wish everybody had as good a time as we do" — the girl clasped her white-gloved hands and met her father's regard.

He nodded. "You're a mighty nice child, and remarkably unspoiled," he remarked judicially.

"I suddenly had an idea when I saw how rather stiff and pale he looked. You know what a fancy Ferdy took to him. Why not invite Mr. Laird to our fête next week. You've often said business and social life should not be mixed, but I wish you'd consent to this, daddy. He needs something to — to enliven him. He looks as if he needed just a good time. Do let me, father. He is a gentleman. I've seen him a good many times and I feel that he must come of nice people, as if he had a lovely mother."

The gloved hands were still tightly clasped. The girl's eyes were luminous and her cheeks glowed with a steady color as she made her impulsive speech.

Her father's expression did not change and he continued to meet her look appreciatively.

"That would be all very well," he returned quietly. "You can always do with an extra man, but how about his wife?"

"His wife!" Vivian echoed the words with such amazement and such a disconcerted air that again a smile curved Adam Breed's gray mustache. "But he's so young!"

"Verily; nevertheless he has two sturdy youngsters with a surprising and precocious vocabulary."

The girl leaned back in her chair, apparently for the moment speechless.

Her father proceeded: "I see you are not keen to invite the wife; and you're more right than you know. She's a fool."

Why Vivian should feel this news to be a personal humiliation, and yet take an odd sort of comfort in it, a psychologist might explain. The eager glow had died from her face, and her gaze was serious.

"You've seen her, then."

"Yes, I called at the house." The speaker gave a whimsical, reminiscent smile. "I'll do anything once."

"That's the only time?"

"Quite so. There may be worse-behaved children, but I've never seen them; and the mother is impossible."

"Is she pretty?" asked Vivian.

"Yes, a bold, poster-variety of good looks."

"It's strange, isn't it, the difference in people's tastes." Vivian was opening and closing her purse.

"Yes, and very convenient it would be if the tastes of husbands and wives could remain unchanged."

"Do you think — Mr. Laird has changed — do you think he's unhappy?" Vivian's tentative manner suddenly altered to one of indignant decision. "What a foolish question! I did n't mean to ask it."

Her former abstraction seemed to have seized her father. He looked away from her and played with a paper-cutter on his desk. "Laird is a problem to me," he said. "I took him because I liked him. I went to his home to see and understand his environment and decide how safely I might advance him. I found that pert and tawdry person and the children she was allow-

ing to come up on her own lines, and I knew the poor chap was doomed. With that ball and chain attachment there was no hope for him. Money would slip through that wife's fingers, and if it didn't, if he succeeded in establishing some discipline, yet there she was. Whatever heights he might rise to — and he is a very alert and competent fellow — there she would be beside him. He has made his bed. For the children's sake he must lie in it." The hard Adam Breed known to the business world was speaking.

Vivian drew a sudden involuntary deep breath. "It is a tragedy," she said crisply, and rose.

"You are entirely right, my dear." Her father followed her movement. "It's a tragedy and we can't do anything."

He was rather surprised at the indignation in the look she flashed upon him. "Of course we can't do anything. That is two people's business entirely," she said with a novel air of maturity.

He smoothed his mustache and his cold eyes twinkled. "The fête invitation is off, then, I judge?"

She flashed him another look. "Good-bye," she said.

He opened the door for her. The secretary rose from his desk.

"Shall Laird show you to the car, my dear?"

"No, indeed. Quite unnecessary."

Joe's eyes followed her as she passed and she did not seem at all the soft, sympathetic creature who had entered the sanctum. She gave him a little unsmiling nod as she flitted through the door he held open for her. Her heart was beating fast and she felt absurdly humiliated as she went out to the car, slipped on her silken dust-coat, and gave her order to the chauffeur.

Joe's teeth closed tight and that line in his forehead deepened. "What has the Governor said to her?" was his mental question as he stood for a time motionless. Then he threw up his hands and returned to his desk. What could the change of mood in a great lady possibly matter to him? He had his job; his life job; his life sentence as the comic papers have it. Well, many a true word is spoken in jest.

"Now, then, Laird, I'll see you." Mr. Breed stood in his open door.

Joe gathered up the mail he had selected, went inside the sanctum, and took the chair Vivian had just vacated. Again he looked about involuntarily for violets. He frowned.

Mr. Breed remembered his daughter's comments and scrutinized his secretary as he had not done for many a day. He was surprised at Joe's haggard appearance. Even youth will show the effect of a sleepless night of mental anguish.

"Well," he began, "did you get the mother?"

"I did, sir."

"Is she — is she quite well?"

"I think so. She's naturally very tired. There are a good many things to see to in closing up a home."

"H'm, of course." Mr. Breed drummed on the desk. "She will stay with you now permanently?"

"Certainly. I'm her only son. This letter from San Francisco you will wish to see first. I think that —"

"That will increase your expenses, Laird."

This interruption a week ago would have caused excited hopefulness in the breast of the private secretary. Now his numbness felt no flutter.

"If you saw her you would n't think so," he said,

forcing a smile. "She is more like a wraith than a woman."

Adam Breed's wandering look fixed with concentration on the other's face. "You said she was very well."

Joe looked up with some surprise. Were mothers one of the soft spots of his employer?

"You see, I don't really know," he replied; "I'm ashamed to say I have n't seen her for a year until now."

"Well, take care of her, Laird. I think you said she has lived alone. It is n't good for one."

"No, especially when they're getting on. My mother will be fifty soon."

"Forty-seven," remarked Adam Breed to his paper-cutter.

Joe looked up. "What — what did you say, sir?"

His employer smoothed his mustache. "I said — what did I say? What I want to say is that I'm very glad you have taken her home. A mother is a precious possession. From your description I judge she is very delicate."

"Yes, she looks so; but she keeps about and never complains."

A lump rose in the speaker's throat. The numbness in his breast felt a throb that suddenly tore it. The brightness of many an unanswered letter; the coarseness of her reception in his home, all swept across him in a well-nigh unbearable pain. His face flushed and Adam Breed read something of the suffering there.

"I'll see to it," he said hastily. "Your income shall be better able to meet the demand." Joe was unable for the moment even to utter thanks. "Now we'll have that San Francisco letter," added Mr. Breed.

When May Ca'line left the breakfast-table that morning she intended to go directly upstairs to put her room in order. Her venerable trunk would arrive soon, and it was going to be a puzzle to decide on a spot to place it. As she entered the living-room voices in the hall arrested her and she waited till the corridor should be free.

Her daughter-in-law was speaking in a tone she had not heard her use; a laughing voice, gay but pettish. "I do wish you'd give me time to get dressed in the morning, Henry."

A man's voice responded: "But the nights are so long."

"Oh, go away, you silly boy!"

"I will if you will go too. The car is just around the corner, you're so fussy about its being in front here."

"You overdid it, Henry, and this is a neighborhood of cats."

"Well, come on."

"I can't. I have n't had my breakfast yet; and look at this costume for motoring."

The man's low voice sounded very assured as he replied: "Oh, I can hang around for half an hour."

"Now, quit. Don't you touch my hair," laughing. "How many times must I tell you? Will you let me take the children?"

"I should say not."

"Very well, then. You know I told you the last time that I must n't go alone with you any more for those long trips."

A pause; then the man spoke. "I can't get you out of my head, and — it's a great day, Gladys."

Her voice was subdued as she replied: "I know it and I'm crazy to go."

"Then, come."

"No; not this time, not just yet. Joe's mother —" her voice fell and May Ca'line lost the rest. She had been so full of her own problems that she had been slow to realize that she was eavesdropping.

With beating heart she had just started to make a hasty retreat to the dining-room when the front door slammed and Gladys, still in the pink negligee, and with her luxuriant black hair twisted up carelessly, entered the living-room. A light of excitement burned in her eyes, and she started at sight of May Ca'line, who faced her like a frightened little animal at bay, her very throat palpitating.

"Oh, are you through breakfast?" said Gladys, flushing and speaking carelessly. "Did you hear that man coming at such a crazy hour? He's a great friend of Joe's and his business makes him have to drive around in a motor and he hates to go alone. He'll take anybody he can get to go with him. He's so fond of Joe and the children, he thinks he can be as informal here as he pleases. I hope you had a good breakfast. I must go after mine now."

This surprising volubility left May Ca'line cold. It flashed sickeningly upon the mother that the man whose back she had caught sight of through the open window, as he descended the walk, might be a main reason for the lack of her own welcome in her daughter-in-law's house.

All she had suffered before seemed as nothing to her emotion now.

She climbed the stairs to her uncomfortable room and exhorted herself not to be hasty. Perhaps it was true that this man was devoted to Joe and the chil-

dren, but the first thing she had heard him say, at the time meaning nothing, gained a sinister sound as it repeated itself insistently. Why, if he loved the children, did he so decidedly refuse their company? It was no strain to suppose that any one would decline their wrangling companionship; but as suspicious as anything she had overheard, was Gladys's start when she saw her, and the sudden good-nature toward one she had evidently deliberately determined to insult.

May Ca'line sat down on the edge of her couch. Accident had now given her what is ordinarily called the whip hand over her daughter-in-law, and she felt faint at the thought. She had been slowly making up her mind to tell Joe, as gently as might be, that she felt that she and his wife would both be happier if he could possibly afford to give her a little room elsewhere, but near them. Now she decided that could not be. Her place was here to give what protection to Joe's wife her presence might afford, no matter how unwelcome.

She warned herself against exaggeration in her estimate of Gladys. The girl was young and vain, and doubtless Joe had n't time, money, or energy to woo and amuse her as he had done before the children came. They were in a hard place. She must keep her head cool and help — help Joe.

## CHAPTER IX

### OVERTURES

**G**LADYS LAIRD ate her breakfast in a resentful mood, which even the remembrance of her admirer's frankly covetous eyes could not brighten. Why had she been so careless as to forget for the moment all about Joe's mother, and that she might be within hearing? Of course she would be a cat.

"I refused to go. She heard that, whatever else she heard. I must tell Henry not to come here. That's all."

Gladys bit her toast vindictively. She could hear the couch being moved as Mrs. Laird made her bed.

Unpacking gave May Ca'line an excuse to remain in her room all the morning. When the lunch-bell rang she admonished herself with remembrance of Martha Berry and descended with as matter-of-fact an air as she could muster.

The children were having their hands washed in the kitchen and their mother brought them in. They were all laughing, and the twins each loudly declared their intention to sit beside the mother.

"Behave yourselves," Gladys good-naturedly ordered. "Now Mrs. Laird is here you can sit one on each side of me." And she moved the high chairs close to her own and the children climbed up.

"She is n't Mrs. Laird," declared Ella. "You're Mrs. Laird. She's grandma."

May Ca'line took her place at the other end of the table.

"Have it your own way," said Gladys. "Perhaps she does n't like to be called grandma."

"I think it's a lovely name," said May Ca'line. The heat had waved her hair in extra rings about her temples and neck and brought color to her thin cheeks.

Gladys gave her a quick glance. "She must have been a pretty girl," she thought.

Being alert for signs of disapproval on account of the incident of the morning, Gladys was glad that the twins had one of their spasms of affection. Each leaned a head against the mother's shoulder and May Ca'line looked at the pretty picture with pleasure. Gladys quickly kissed each little forehead.

"Now, sit up, darlings, and eat your lunch," she said. "You know we're going to the movie."

She looked across at her mother-in-law. "Blessings on movies and trolley cars," she said, laughing because the twins were vying with each other as to which could reach farthest around her plump shoulders and squeeze her the tightest.

"You must go to the movie with us, Mrs. Laird," she said graciously. "The theater is only two squares away."

May Ca'line hesitated, but for every reason she felt that she should accept the friendly overture.

A few minutes more found the four *en route*. May Ca'line soon discovered that the theater was the neighborhood Mecca. Children of all ages were in the audience. One suddenly waking up in the hall would have believed himself in a nursery.

The house darkened to reveal the first scene of a farce, and the children shouted with glee at the frowsy women and drunken men who fell into horse-tubs or

whitewash buckets, drove each other about with brooms, made catapults of custard pies and used the Irishman's simple rule of life, "Whenever you see a head, hit it"; and toward the end, armed with revolvers, shot at everybody as impartially.

May Ca'line was simply appalled at the precocity displayed by the juvenile portion of the audience. Any child old enough to walk alone, displayed in his comments an unbelievable sophistication.

In the play which followed, the same canniness was observable. The scene was laid in the wild West. The feats of the cowboys, the abduction of the heroine, the wild race for the mountain cabin, made May Ca'line's heart stand still. The twins recognized the hero appearing timely on the scene, long before May Ca'line did. They clapped their tiny hands and jumped up and down in their seats, adding their cheers to those that sprang from dozens of short larynxes who applauded the dire revenge which exhausted the hero's ample armory and left the woods strewn with the dead and dying.

May Ca'line looked at Gladys, who was placidly chewing gum and viewing the scene with blasé eyes. "Are n't there any babies any more?" she thought piteously. She left the theater bewildered.

Her son felt that the return home this evening started a new chapter in his life. Mr. Breed's interest and willingness to raise his salary had caused him to write to Simon Berry as follows:—

DEAR MR. BERRY:—

I am enclosing the payment of my mother's grocery bill, and in so doing, wish to thank you for extending credit to her. I admit that I deserved the comments which you made

on my lack of consideration, and I assure you that it is my intention to try to make up for it for the rest of her life.

Please give my sincere thanks to Mrs. Berry, and to Miss Woodward, when you see her, for the help they gave my mother in the hard circumstances under which she left Leacock. I feel more grateful to them than I can express.

Yours sincerely,

JOSEPH LAIRD.

## CHAPTER X

### AT EVENING

GLADYS continued to regard her mother-in-law with a mental attitude of armed neutrality during the remainder of the afternoon. She tried to discover in her behavior whether that untoward event of the morning was remembered against her; but May Ca'line was too completely a stranger for her to make any estimate. Was she or was she not a cat? Would she or would she not make trouble between husband and wife, if the question was one of her own maternal pride? Would she attach importance to anything so trivial?

Gladys made several occasions during the day to speak affectionately of Joe, and the little love-scene between her and the children at the lunch-table had been all any one could ask. Surely a woman with such anchors was safe.

Yet poor little May Ca'line's heart beat faster each time certain endearing tones and words of the morning recurred to her, and they had haunted her all day. Her fingers knotted together. A married flirt had always been an abomination in her eyes. Leacock knew no half-tones. Women there were rated either as good or bad.

At six o'clock the twins were called in to have their supper and go to bed.

"Don't they sit up to see their father?" asked May Ca'line.

"I should say not," returned Gladys. "When I once

get them washed I'm not going through the dressing operation again. We have to live so far out of the world for economy's sake that Joe gets home very late to dinner."

Gladys was with his mother on the porch when he arrived. May Ca'line discerned his tall form through the cucumber vines. She sat still and Gladys ran down the steps to meet him.

"Oh," thought the mother, "why did I go into the living-room this morning!" If only she were in ignorance, she could take such satisfaction in the hearty greeting bestowed on her boy. He came up the steps and saw her.

"That's the little mother," he said, and, approaching, kissed her where she sat in the piazza chair. Gladys was still hanging on his arm.

"This has been a scorcher, has n't it? Now, then, mother, for a wash and down again in five minutes. Feeling a little rested, are you?"

"Yes, dear, and you, I hope."

Dinner that night was a tolerably agreeable meal. Gladys, by no means yet entirely at ease, assumed no sulky air, and Nora waited on them all like a solicitous hen among her brood.

"Seems to me our mother looks rather pretty to-night," said Joe, for a flush of excitement was on May Ca'line's cheeks. She was wearing a faded blue-sprigged muslin which on other summers had attended church at Leacock. It was shabby and clean like everything else she possessed. She had made up her mind to say something, no matter how hard her heart beat, and she was biding her time until Nora should be out of hearing; but Nora could not trust any of them to con-

duct their dinners properly, and she popped in and out of the room so assiduously that it was not until the three were seated on the porch and twilight was far advanced that May Ca'line found her opportunity.

"You don't smoke, do you, Joe?" she said, clearing her throat.

Gladys was sitting in the swing, her buff frock pale against the dark vines. "Have n't you found out that we don't do anything that costs money?" she rejoined. "Come here and sit with me, Joe; there's plenty of room."

"This is all right," he returned from his place on the piazza rail. "I get a little breeze."

May Ca'line meant to leave the young couple very soon, making an excuse to write a letter, but conscience compelled her to speak first. She was instinctively afraid of the passionate strength which Gladys's physique indicated, and afraid of her heavy brows and full lips. She dreaded to cross her, to appear to criticize her, but she must speak.

"I have something I want to say to you, dear children," she began.

Gladys's heart gave a leap. "For pity's sake, if it's serious, wait till it's cooler!" she exclaimed.

"Not at all, mother. We want to hear it," said Joe.

Gladys caught her lip in her teeth and braced herself. Her brain was busy with a dozen explanations and excuses.

"You will think me old-fashioned and I know I am; but some of the old fashions were best. I feel that the young mothers of to-day don't realize that it is like giving brandy to their little children to take them to these moving-picture plays."

Gladys's heart resumed its normal beat. She gave a slight, derisive laugh, and May Ca'line looked at her appealingly. "All sorts of roughness, coarseness, drunkenness, cruelty, and murder spread before those tender, impressible minds. It is n't right."

"They don't know what they're seeing," scoffed Gladys. "It all rolls off them like water off a duck's back."

"I believe not," said Joe. "Those babes of ours are highly excited to-night, and this is n't the first time they have tried to reconstruct scenes of bloodshed for me. I never really understood it before."

"I took your mother to the movie hoping to entertain her," said Gladys coldly.

"Yes, and it was very kind of you," returned May Ca'line earnestly.

"There are people of judgment," went on Gladys, unheeding the interruption, "employed to censor plays and decide whether they are all right for the public to see. After that there's no need of making a fuss about it."

"They could n't have been thinking of little children when they sent out those we saw to-day."

"Decidedly not," said Joe, "and they can't think much about children. Consequently, I think mother is right, Gladys, and there should be a second censorship in the home."

"And she is to be it, I suppose," said Gladys disagreeably.

"No, no, my dear, I'm too ignorant of the matter," returned May Ca'line, "but when your attention is called to it —"

"Yes, that's it," said Joe. "There are numbers of

pretty, girlie plays. You know the stars and their specialties. Just don't go hit or miss, that's all. I most decidedly object to the children's seeing a lot of this brutalizing stuff. It's too exciting and we don't know how much the little minds soak up like sponges."

"That's right. Take away anything that makes my life easier," said Gladys, with a flashing look at her mother-in-law, visible in the fading light. "If you think it's any joke to take care of those children all day, you had better stay home once in a while and try it."

"I hope you'll let me help you a great deal," said May Ca'line, her knees trembling a little, but exhorting herself to be brave in a good cause. "I love to play with children and amuse them."

"Thank you, but I don't wish you to trouble yourself."

Gladys rose and went into the house. Her quick temper was burning hot within her and she could not trust herself. She might say something that would provoke Joe's mother to the extent of referring to Henry. She had come to feel, by May Ca'line's whole propitiatory attitude during the day, that she intended to keep silence on that subject. However, she did not go upstairs now, but slipped into the dark living-room, near an open window.

May Ca'line's hands were clasped tight together. "I'm sorry, Joe," she said apologetically.

"I'm glad," he answered briefly, and rising from the rail took the chair beside his mother. She welcomed him with her eyes.

"I have something to say to you, dear," she said unsteadily, in a low voice.

There was a sound in the living-room behind them, and they both turned their heads.

"It's nothing," said Joe; "I hope you always will have something to say to me. We have the arrears of years to make up."

"But it's so disagreeable, dear," returned his mother piteously.

Gladys, listening, clasped her hands on her heart.

"I can't get it out of my mind, Joe, and I ought to have told you sooner, but I was a coward. You have so much to carry."

He reached over and closed his big hand over her two little ones. "I wonder if it has anything to do with bills," he said.

"Yes, oh, yes. How did you guess it?"

"Oh, it's a natural weakness for such a little sport as you are."

She gave half a sigh, half a sob. "I think I am naturally gay," she said, "but there's nothing left of me now but a little scared mouse."

He laughed. Gladys set her teeth. Her heart was pounding out its relief, but she resented the love sound in that laugh. They were two of a kind. They were glad she had come into the house. Joe would n't laugh if *she* confessed to bills.

"I know all about it, dear, if it's the grocer."

"Oh, Joe, it *is* the grocer. It's Mr. Berry. Did he really send it to you? Oh, I think he should n't have!"

"I paid it to-day. That's wiped off the slate."

May Ca'line lifted her boy's hand to her cheek.

"It's a shame you had to worry about it," he went on. "I've been thinking of another thing to-day. Our

house is small and I'm afraid we can't make you very comfortable."

May Ca'line looked up with big, startled eyes. She felt what was coming, and Gladys, inside, listened acutely.

"How should you like to have a room near us, instead of in the house?"

Gladys smiled eagerly in the darkness. How could Joe afford it, but how fine if she could get this interloper out!

"Oh, Joe, dear, I don't mind having a small room." His mother's voice was unsteady in its earnestness. She almost stammered. "I'll try to be just as little trouble as I can, and perhaps, after awhile, Gladys will let me help her. I really have a kind of knack with children, I really have, Joe —"

"Don't I remember? Don't I remember?"

"And so please let me stay, dear."

"Let you stay — my little mother!"

Gladys scowled into the darkness. She could not see how her husband gathered the wavy head into his arms and kissed the worried brow, but she heard the tender tone.

"Well," he said, "the offer is open. Any time that you feel you would prefer the other arrangement let me know, and we'll make it. Mr. Breed inquired very particularly and politely about you to-day."

"That was nice of him."

"He seems to think a mother is a rather precious possession."

"Yes, losing his so early."

"Did he? Well," Joe laughed, "have you been reading him up in the papers?"

"I — I somehow heard that, dear."

"I believe it's the truth; but printed facts about prominent people are usually print only. He has a tough trial in the invalidism of his only son."

"How sad that is!"

"Very. A boy about eighteen in a wheeled chair."

"I'm so sorry for them both," said May Ca'line. "You said he has a daughter too."

"Yes, a human flower, sheltered from every rough wind, but robust enough not to be afraid of them. A refreshing human being."

"I'm so glad for him. I tell you, Joe, the heart knoweth its own bitterness. We can't judge from appearances."

Gladys tiptoed out of the room and upstairs.

A letter addressed to Henry Bird was sealed and lying on the desk when Joe came up. He noticed it.

"What are you saying to that bounder?" he asked indifferently.

"Do you wish your mother to censor it?" asked Gladys.

"Steady, Gladys, steady. It was nice of you to take her to the show this afternoon. I want you to know that I appreciate any little attention you show her."

"Great thanks I got for it. I wish to Heaven I had not taken her. Then there would n't have been all this fuss about the children."

"We have an awful responsibility to those children, Gladys. Sometimes I think you don't realize it."

"What a lot of things you think!" said Gladys scornfully, and proceeded mutely to get ready for bed.

Her husband followed suit in silence. His wife's fitful aloofness was now, and ever must be, his oasis in the desert.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CERTAIN ONE

ALL night and the next day May Ca'line's problem weighed heavily upon her. She had incurred Gladys's wrath concerning the moving-picture plays, and she dreaded meeting her morning mood. A sudden climax of emotion flushed her face. "Would n't it be awful," she thought, "if I should come to hate my boy's wife! What shall I do?"

A longing to get out and away was overwhelming. After breakfast she passed Gladys and the children as they were coming down stairs, and said good-morning without regard as to whether the greeting was returned. She put her room in order, then with her hat on, and jacket over her arm, she went out into the summer morning.

The direction they had taken yesterday led to a region of shops, so she turned the opposite way, and in ten minutes found herself near a park. Eagerly she left the thickly built-up street and entered the green space. Its winding paths, trees, shrubs, and pond seemed like a little paradise to her eyes, aching with unshed tears.

Nurses with perambulators, and children playing on the grass unforbidden, made her think of those little ones of her own blood. "I could bring the children here every day," she thought, "but Gladys would n't let me." Her eyelids stung. She moved close to the water and saw a bench underneath an elm

tree whose graceful branches were motionless in the still morning.

A woman dressed in white was sitting at one end of the bench, reading. May Ca'line looked about for another seat, but this was the only one in shadow, so she approached and sat down on the vacant end of the rustic seat, which would easily have held four. Her neighbor merely glanced up and went on with her reading, and May Ca'line soon forgot her in her own thoughts.

She wondered if Joe would consent to her trying to get some position to earn money when she had regained a little more of her old strength and energy. How was she to regain it if she was wretchedly unhappy? Did she owe it to Joe to remain in her uncomfortable position on the mere chance of helping his showy wife not to forget what was due him?

The woman at the other end of the bench was one who was alive to signs of hunger. She knew there were many kinds. In her one glance at the newcomer's face she had seen symptoms.

Now May Ca'line heaved an unconscious sigh and had to lift her handkerchief quickly. At once her neighbor moved up beside her.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

May Ca'line started, and looked around through the veil of two more large tears that trembled on her pretty lashes. She saw a kindly pair of eyes regarding her out of a countenance which expressed somehow a calm certainty.

"You speak like some one who lives in a small place," she said.

"I don't," replied the other, smiling, "but I used to."

"Did you?" rejoined May Ca'line. "Then you'll understand how strange the city seems to me. I'm from the country."

"You're homesick, then?"

"No, I have n't any home." The corners of the speaker's lips twitched down, and if ever a human being felt ardently sorry for herself, that being was the once optimistic May Ca'line Laird. She began to weep into her handkerchief heartily and disconsolately.

"Now, I think you'd better stop crying and tell me all about it."

The weeping one had exercised so much repression in the last days that this invitation from one who looked so calmly certain, and so kindly withal, was irresistible. The sore heart began to pour forth its burden. She had an extraordinary sensation of relief when her tale was ended.

"It has done me good to tell you," she said, no longer sobbing, and looking at her companion wistfully. "You must be the kindest woman in the world to listen to a stranger like this."

"Each one of us is his brother's keeper," was the answer.

"Then you do think I do right to stay on where I'm in the way and unwelcome, for my daughter-in-law's sake?"

"It would seem so for the present, but let us get away from effects and look at causes. Probably you have a God."

"Why, of course. Oh, yes, indeed; I've said prayers enough to weary Him."

"Did you ever expect them to be answered?"

"Yes — for a long time I did, but then — then I

think we both got discouraged." There was a suggestion of the old twinkle in May Ca'line's swelled eyes, and the Certain lady smiled.

"Yes, you see your God was one that could get discouraged, because you made Him up."

"Why — what do you mean?"

"You were contenting yourself with a less being than God Himself, the God of the Bible. First of all, we want to find out in our troubles if we are working with God or against Him."

May Ca'line looked interested. Hers was the temperament to which nothing is too good to be true, yet which, when often beaten and disappointed, sinks to the depths of dejection.

"How are we to know whether we are working with Him?" she returned.

"One way is to ask if we are happy. The Bible continually bids us to rejoice. 'Rejoice always.' "

"Oh, I love to be happy!" exclaimed May Ca'line wistfully.

"Yes, it is the right of mankind. You can see at once, if you think, that God could n't create evil, so all of it that seems to appear in the world has come about by somebody's wrong belief about something."

"I never thought of that."

"The more you think of it the more you will see it is reasonable — the only possible thought."

"Then all the bad people —"

"Yes, there are n't any." The Certain woman smiled at the startled, suspicious look her companion suddenly turned upon her. Evidently May Ca'line began to doubt her new friend's sanity.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating, my

dear," continued the stranger. "I know such a statement sounds wild in the face of all we meet in this mistaken, material world, and so we have to keep patiently going back to God whom the people in all the churches admit every Sunday is Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient. We go back to Him and unless we believe in some other creator, some rival to God, we come to know that all the evil we have to deal with is mistaken belief which has grown into such solid certainty in all these years, that a change will only come by the individual patiently working out the problem for himself and proving that he has a right to rejoice always."

There was no insanity in that calm, certain face, and there was assuredly kindness.

May Ca'line's brow knotted in her desire to follow. "But how — how does one begin?" she asked.

The Certain one met her puzzled look with a smile. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

"Oh, you believe in the devil, then?"

"Yes, its name is Fear."

May Ca'line nodded. "I believe that, too," she said. ("Just three things we have to remember. Three rules of life laid down in the Bible, not once but many times. Fear not. Love one another. Rejoice always. You know how some hymns of the colored people talk about 'the lowlands o' sorrow.' That is a good expression. Lowlands breed miasma, the miasma of self-pity, for instance. We have to learn to be mental aviators and rise above that mist and unwholesomeness into the clear air and sunlight of God. We shall if we live by the three rules and do so intelligently — have a reason for the faith that is in us. Now, when you go back, know beyond doubt that each person you

meet is a loving, pure creation of God. This you can do without approving one wrong thing that they do or say. In your thought hold them up to what they really are — see them as God sees them, and know that somewhere, some time, they will know that truth too. Above all, we must watch our thoughts, for our thought is all that God cares about, our actions are the fruit of that; and one's self is the only person he has a right to dominate, to change. God leaves His creation in freedom and so must we.”)

May Ca'line's eyes shone with interest as she drank in the calm of the other's look. “I know now,” she said. “I've heard of people that think the way you do. You don't believe that God sends sickness either.”

“Do you?” The calm one smiled.

“Why, sickness does people good sometimes — they say.”

“Then what do ‘they’ think was the reason that ‘Jesus healed every manner of disease among the people’? He set an example for the world to follow. Why did n't He sometimes tell a sick man that for his soul's good He would leave him in that condition for a time?”

May Ca'line looked at the path at her feet, and shook her head as one who had been asked to take in more new ideas than she could sustain.

“I must go now,” said her new friend, “and I will leave with you this article in case you are interested to read it.” She put in May Ca'line's lap a pamphlet which bore on its cover the title, “Prayer and Confidence.” She took the little woman's hard, ungloved hand in her own. “Read Isaiah,” she said. “Find out the real God who is never discouraged, and take Him

at His word; God who 'is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity.—' Good-bye."

She was gone around the huge trunk of the elm tree before May Ca'line had lifted her eyes from the cover of the pamphlet.

She awoke from her brown study and started to her feet. "Oh!" she called, and ran upon the grass and looked in all directions. The Certain one had gone.

"I did n't ask her name. I did n't find out where she lived. Oh, I can't lose her!" she exclaimed aloud, and even hurried in both directions to see if a fold of the white gown was discernible, but her new friend had vanished.

"Was it real!" gasped May Ca'line. The little brown pamphlet was in her hands. She clasped it to her breast. Prayer and *Confidence*. If she could ever feel confident again!

She moved toward home with a lighter step, new courage in her heart. She wanted to tell Joe everything she had heard, and to hear him say that it sounded reasonable. If it was true that God's children might become better acquainted with Him, as it were, and thereby come closer, every sad soul ought to know it, and even in the short and few glimpses she had had of her boy in his home, she felt convinced that the heart within his bosom was often sad and heavy.

As she neared the block of houses in which was home she began counting. They were all exactly alike, and she had impressed on her mind that the third house from this end was Joe's.

Just as she discerned it, the door opened. A man came out and she heard him say, "So long," before

it closed behind him and he ran down the steps. She recognized the strident voice, and instead of turning in at the house, she followed the man's jaunty figure with an unreasoning instinct to see where he went. Even the wren defends its young. Little May Ca'line hastened her steps not to lose sight of him. He walked straight ahead for one square, then turned down a side street and stopped before a runabout car, which was parked before a vacant lot.

What had she accomplished, merely to see a man drive away in his car? As she passed him she received the impression of a very new checked suit, the back of a thick neck, cleanly shaved, a red tie, and the flash of a diamond ring on the hand working at the car. She walked on slowly. As soon as she should hear the whirr of the engine she would turn and go home. The street was a quiet one, but she heard no promising sound. She crossed the road and looked back. The checked suit was lounging in the quiet car, its owner's hat was off and his eyes were absorbed in a newspaper.

May Ca'line's heart contracted. "He is waiting!" She hastened up the opposite side of the street and turned toward home. Entering, she met Gladys in the hall, hatted and veiled, and with a light wrap over her arm. She thought her daughter-in-law started, but the young woman spoke nonchalantly:—

"Back so soon? I'm going out to make a call. I may stay for lunch, so don't wait for me."

"Do you think you'd better, Gladys?" May Ca'line spoke breathlessly and beseechingly. "It's very warm. Had n't you better stay at home, dear?"

Gladys stared at her. "What an idea! Do I look like a delicate flower?"

"You don't need a wrap. I would n't go, Gladys. Oh, don't go! Joe does n't like you to, does he?"

Gladys forced a laugh. Her mother-in-law's eyes made her uncomfortable. She was uncanny; but how could she suspect anything? "Of course, Joe wants me to," she answered roughly. "You must have got a touch of the sun this morning. There's a detective play at the movie this afternoon. Of course, the children must n't go because it's nearly certain the criminal will be shot, but you might like to see the detective work. Nora has charge of the children, so don't bother about them."

She went out the door and closed it behind her loudly, leaving May Ca'line pressing her pamphlet to her breast and staring after her with wide eyes.

"O God," she whispered, "you have given us the three hardest things in life to do: not to be afraid, to rejoice, and to love everybody!"

Feeling as if she had been bruised by a heavy hand, she turned and made her way out toward the kitchen.

## CHAPTER XII

### ROSE LEDGE

NORA looked up at her entrance. "Good ye went out for a walk," she said, noting the life, not to say excitement, in the little woman's face.

"Yes, I found such a pretty park. It makes everything so much pleasanter to know there is a place like that near by. Do the children ever go there?"

"Whin there's some one to take them they do, but the movies is livelier."

"It's too lively for little folks sometimes, I think."

"Mrs. Laird was sayin' that same," remarked Nora, smiling at her dishpan. "She told the children they could n't go, along o' their grandmother."

"Oh, I'm sorry. That would make the children dislike me."

Nora nodded as one who could tell tales, but would not.

"Mrs. Laird is not coming home to lunch, she just told me."

"Sure she won't, thin. Whin I heerd Mr. Bir-rd's voice a while ago I knew she would n't be home to lunch."

"Who is Mr. Bird? Some close friend of my son?" May Ca'line tried to speak carelessly while she prayed for an affirmative answer, a lifted load, and a free heart to go out and make peace with the children.

"Close frind, is it? Mr. Laird loves him the way the divil loves holy water. Why would n't he? Mr.

Laird's a grand gentleman even if he's only a boy. Mr. Bir-rd chucks me under the chin whin I go to the door to let him in. He does truly think that even a poor gir-rl like me would be crazy about him. I'd box his ears fer him if I dared, but I know out I'd go if I made him mad, and — I don't like to leave 'em alone."

The sun color faded from her hearer's face. She regarded the buxom girl fixedly. "I thank you, Nora, for your loyalty. Mrs. Laird is young and likes a good time, of course."

The speaker was pressing her pamphlet between her hands and trying to remember the three rules.

One minute she felt that it was traitorous to Joe not to tell him that his wife was clandestinely seeing a man whom he disapproved; the next, she was assuring herself that interference between husband and wife was criminal. If Nora would only tell him! But Nora evidently felt that it was more important that she should be there to minister to the comfort of her master and the children than to make any revelation.

It was in the same park on the following Sunday that Vivian Breed was sitting in view of the road and waiting rather impatiently, when Joe Laird, escorting his family, strolled into sight. She recognized him in the distance. With him was a showy young woman in a corn-colored frock and large black picture hat. As she came nearer, it was observable that she wore long jet earrings and was chewing gum vigorously. Vivian gazed at her scrutinizingly. There was a fork in the path along which they were advancing; one arm led to the water, the other past the bench on which she was sitting. She hoped they would take the first, and

meanwhile gazed with scornful but eager curiosity at the group. The twins walked one on each side of their father and he held them by the hand. Vivian paid no attention to them; the young man's face engrossed her. It wore the same look of white immobility she had noted in the office, and the high-colored, frankly chewing, conspicuous young woman accompanying the trio seemed to Vivian ample explanation of this stoicism.

"Say, come over this way. I see a shady seat." The strong, nasal voice exactly suited the large buckles, hat, and yellow gown of its possessor.

Vivian's heart leaped in her throat. They were taking her path. Why should she care? She did care ridiculously. She could not endure to see the humiliation of one who seemed to belong to so different a human stratum.

A minute more and they had reached her. She saw at once that she need not have dreaded. The moment her father's secretary recognized her his face changed. He released his hands from Bob's, took off his hat, and as they advanced paused before her bench. She rose.

"This is the very last place I should expect to meet you, Miss Breed. Let me introduce my wife. Here, too, is the heir-apparent and the princess-royal."

Vivian, looking lovely with her deeply flushed cheeks, shook hands with them all. The children and their mother stared at the gray-clad figure in the floating, chiffon veil, Gladys mightily excited by a near view of this one of the town's exclusives, whose triumphs she had followed so closely.

"Something happened to the machine just as we were passing the park and father did n't want me to sit about the garage, so I'm here until called for."

"We're going to feed the swans," said Ella, who grudged any delay in the programme, "just as soon as we've found a shady place for mother to sit."

"What's the matter with my feeding the swans?" inquired Gladys, who had no idea of being left out if a society affair was impending.

"Don't let me detain you," said Vivian; "I'm tired of sitting and I'm going to walk about a bit." The appalling possibility that Mrs. Joseph Laird might change her mind concerning the swans and commit her to a *tête-à-tête* on the shady bench, determined her quick action.

"Ain't she a beauty!" exclaimed Gladys when they had parted; "and she don't seem a bit stuck up, does she, Joe?"

"No" he answered passively.

"I don't believe I care about going to the water after all. It's too sunny." Gladys yawned and took the seat Vivian had quitted, with the hope that Miss Breed might become weary of walking and return to the shade.

Vivian, however, spied the tropical bird from afar and avoided the trap. Her thoughts were busy. She was glad she had seen Mr. Laird with his family before he was on guard.

"How well he behaved," she thought. "Not too much, not too little. He is a gentleman."

The resentment she had felt at first on finding that so desirable a person had spoiled his life foolishly, from this time on gave way to a grave sympathy for the obvious mismating. Any boy, even Ferdy, if he were strong and well, might be dazzled by big black eyes, high color, and jet earrings, and take the irrevocable

step without consideration. It was the long years of paying for such a mistake that one should deplore and compassionate in such a case, rather than to criticize.

For days afterward the scene often recurred to her. The look on Joe Laird's face before he saw her. Its lighting when he did. The predisposition she had always felt in his favor warmed into admiration at the absence of embarrassment in his introductions. All that her father had said of the hopelessness of the young fellow's handicap was burned into her memory. He was fine-grained. He displayed no *gaucherie*.

"I like him. That's all. It's a great shame and I must n't think about it. It's too hard. Such a chance as he has there in the office, and yet father holding him back, *because* —!" The mental image of Gladys rose before her.

Vivian's gay summer life left her little time to dwell on other people's worries. The heavy anxiety she and her father had to carry in the invalidism of her brother accompanied this gayety and was always shadowing it; but she had found that it doubled her father's sorrow when she failed to enter into the life of the young people of her set, and she made her house-parties happy affairs more to please him than herself.

One day, about a fortnight after the *rencontre* in the park, she was sitting in a hammock under the trees when she saw her father's car enter between the massive stone posts of the gateway. It was the middle of the afternoon and breezes swept across the velvet turf of Rose Ledge and waved the famous elms. The low, spreading stone house stood on a height, and the road from the park gate wound up to the imposing entrance through blossom-laden rose trees.

Vivian jumped from the hammock and approaching the drive saw that her father was not alone. He leaned forward, raising his hat. The chauffeur stopped.

"That's right, Vivian. Take care of Laird until I get some papers ready."

Joe, bareheaded to the breeze, left the car, which moved on.

"I dare say it's cooler in the house," said the girl, as she greeted him.

"No; if you like to stay out here I prefer it."

Vivian saw the appreciation in his eyes as he looked off on hill and vale and glinting lake, the trees massed against the summer sky, the freshness and beauty of the cherished sward.

"Then come over to the pavilion and we'll have something cold," returned Vivian. She wondered what cooped-up city home was his; and Gladys would have been delighted to know that she instantly planned to interest her father in sending this pale face away for a vacation.

"You look as if you were meditating tennis," said Joe, glancing over her costume.

"I am, a little later."

"You won't let me detain you."

"No, I was lying here reading when you came in. Try that chair."

She seated herself on the edge of her couch and Joe sank into the hammock chair with a sigh of comfort.

"The lap of luxury," he said, smiling.

She thought his smile and eyes unusually satisfactory. Why did it always happen that the most attractive men married before a *débutante* could meet them? Not that she could by any possibility ever have chosen

a man who could be aware of the existence of gaudy women like the sample she had seen, no matter how much she might like his hair-cut and his quiet air of self-possession.

A man in livery came across the lawn bearing a tray. As he approached, a pleasant tinkling of ice was heard. The servant stood after depositing the tray on a table beside his young mistress.

"You may go, Simmons. We will serve ourselves."

Joe moved his chair until the two young people were *vis-à-vis* across the table. The swaying branches above them cast brocading shadows over Vivian's white corduroy.

"Is n't it rather unusual to find you alone?" he asked, watching the girl's hands among the glasses. "One can almost hear the quiet to-day."

"Yes, this is the calm between two storms. One house-party just gone and the next not yet come."

"It's very beautiful," said Joe, not specifying what, but regarding his companion's hair. He noted the book on the hammock. "What is that you are reading?"

"'Middlemarch.'"

Joe smiled. "How unexpected. Are you like the man — I think it was the great and good Emerson, who said, 'When a new book comes out I read an old one?'"

"How discouraging to authors! No; but I've somehow missed 'Middlemarch' until now. I suppose you have n't read it?"

"Why should you suppose that?"

"Why — because" — Vivian colored — "did n't you say — I judged from what you said that you were like father and began so young to be too busy."

Joe laughed quietly in a way to set her entirely at

ease. "You're quite right. There never has been a time when I should have been likely to sit down and read 'Middlemarch,' but you see it was read to me."

He accepted an iced drink from his hostess's sun-browned hands, and she flashed him a surprised glance. Was it possible to conceive of Mrs. Joseph Laird in such a position? Was he really going to be able to influence her to take an interest in such things?

A slow color crept over Joe Laird's face as he read her thought, and he stirred the fruit in his glass.

"You see, I made a wonderfully wise choice of a mother," he said. "We lived in a little country town where there were mighty few things for a boy to do in the evening. She was interested in everything in print, and she was such fun herself, and so enthusiastic that she kept all the wild colts in the neighborhood quiet nights with apples and books. You see which I put first. The only stories we had or could borrow were the standards, so we heard everything from Fenimore Cooper to George Eliot."

"I knew you had a nice mother," said Vivian, with her characteristic, impulsive naïveté. She blushed again under her companion's regard.

"I could search that speech for an exceedingly pleasant compliment."

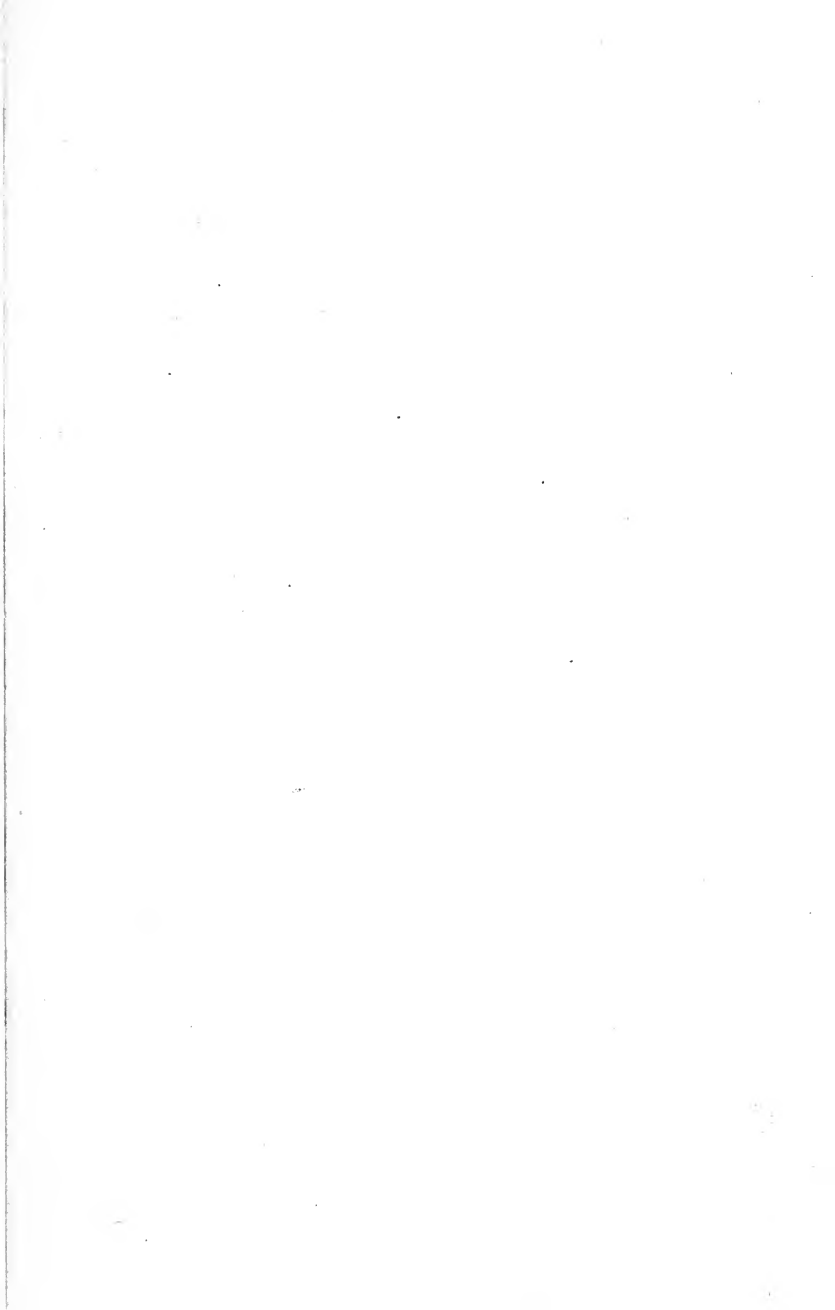
"I pay them sometimes," said the girl, with fine carelessness, "and when I do they're always obvious. Do you remember the story of 'Middlemarch'?"

"Vaguely."

"I'm glad it's only vaguely, for I've just reached the place where Dorothy begins to suspect that Casaubon is n't the right man for her, and you might tell me something."



" I KNEW YOU HAD A NICE MOTHER "



"Oh, yes, I remember now."

"Well, don't tell."

"Never. I simply remember a bad case of incompatibility."

"I should say so. How could that foolish girl be so hypnotized — and there was Ladislav right in sight all the time."

"The right man?"

Vivian clasped her hands over her ears. "Don't *tell* me."

Joe laughed. "I won't, because I don't know. I can't quite remember the ending."

"She's just finding out what an image she has married. Poor girl!"

"Poor girl, indeed! But poor man, too. He was a great student, I believe."

"Yes, a student of things nobody cares anything about. Why should you pity him?"

Joe gave his attention to cutting a strawberry in his glass. "Because in such marriages the suffering can't be one-sided."

"He is n't the sort of person who could feel anything."

"He does n't show it, perhaps, but he'll find out that he has lost her love."

"Now, you're telling me," declared Vivian accusingly.

"Not at all. I'm composing. That's the next logical step, is n't it?"

"There is n't any logic in love."

At the quick reply Joe glanced up. Vivian was gazing off at the lake, sparkling among the trees. He looked at her hands. It was possible she might be

engaged without the newspapers blazoning the fact, but her slender fingers were ringless.

"Well," he remarked, "I think you've guessed right the very first time as to that."

"And the Dr. Casaubons of the world can't suffer," she said, looking back at him.

"There you're wrong. That is one thing we all have a talent for. If Dr. Casaubon was the wrong man for Dorothy, she was equally the wrong woman for him; and she should n't have all the sympathy."

Vivian regarded the speaker a minute in silence. His eyes fell from hers and he turned and looked over his shoulder. "I wonder if Mr. Breed expects me to come to the house?"

"He'll send for you, I'm sure," said Vivian hastily. — "I had n't thought of that argument, but I suppose there was some high-brow woman with a skin like parchment and feelings all dried up into a craze for study, who would never have missed anything in that old curmudgeon."

"Possibly." Joe smiled. "You see, the trouble is these unwise bookworms allow themselves to be deterred by the parchment."

"Let us walk down to the lake," said Vivian. "I'm sure if we stay here you are going to tell me whether Dorothy ever gets free and marries Will Ladislaw."

"Do you want her to?"

Joe rose and they moved away over the clipped lawn.

"Certainly I do. I'm just living to have her."

"No matter what she breaks doing it?"

"Oh, of course, I want it to be done in some nice way; but he loves her and I sympathize with him. I

always want every Jack to get his Jill. I'm terribly romantic, Mr. Laird."

Joe again gave his quiet laugh. "I don't believe that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because you would have been trapped before this. Some lucky chap would have been waiting for you at the college gate."

"Oh, I have a father," said Vivian demurely.

"It will have to be a prince to win his consent, I know; a prince of to-day, be it understood, no white charger, but miracles of motors galore."

"Father does n't care so much about money."

"No, only the things that money brings."

"How little it brings," said Vivian, with a change of tone. "Think of Ferdy."

"How is he to-day?"

"I don't know. He is n't even here. The doctor says his trouble is all nerves. He overdid, his first year in college, and when he had to leave he seemed to feel it abnormally: considered it a disgrace, you know, and all that. Well, recently he decided he would go away, and where to, do you suppose?" Vivian looked up into her companion's serious, sympathetic face. "He wanted to go to our house in town."

"Away from this paradise?"

"No wonder you are astonished; and, oh, Mr. Laird, you don't know what it is to me to feel that I — *I* am the reason."

"There must be some mistake about that," put in Joe, stirred by her eyes and trembling lips.

"I am between two fires. If I don't have guests and gayety here, it distresses father. No matter how much

I try to persuade him that it's hard on Ferdy, he really does n't believe it. Of course, Ferdy has his own apartments and we're with him a great deal, but he knows that a lot of things are going on that he can't be in and it chafes him. Father says if I don't live the life he thinks is normal for me, he is the father of two failures, instead of one. I have n't known how to manage any differently." Vivian stopped, choked.

"I wonder if I could do anything; if I could go to see him."

"Possibly after awhile. Just now he has laid down the rule of no visitors. Father calls every day, but the doctor orders us to humor him."

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," said Joe.

The girl's breath caught in her throat. "There come the tennis-players," she exclaimed as a machine rolled through the park gate, full of bareheaded young folk, whose laughter and gay cries broke upon the summer quiet. "I see father on the steps, too. He is looking for you."

She put out her hand and Joe clasped it. "I'm glad we had this little visit," she said, her honest, lovely eyes full of friendliness. "I can't speak of Ferdy to father because we don't agree. If you are here when the game is over, you must meet my friends and have tea with us."

They retraced their steps, Vivian waving a hand toward the visiting machine.

Joe hastened to meet his employer. Nothing was farther from his wish than to have tea with Vivian's friends, but his talk with her had been more refreshing to him than the breezes that came across the lake.

## CHAPTER XIII

WILLIS FROTHINGHAM

MAY CA'LINE'S letters to Leacock had been carefully worded, but had not really deserved the signature of Sapphira. Yet, at the close of each letter which Hetty and Martha shared, the latter would shake her head with the comment: "You know May Ca'line!"

Hetty resented this. She preferred to invest her old friend's modest picture with an added luster. "I don't know why you should doubt her, Martha," she said. "There's the facts right before your eyes. A hired girl, a lovin' son, children healthy as colts, a movie theater two squares away in one direction, and a park three squares away in the other; her time her own; no worry about expenses. The fat o' the land I should call it. The fat o' the land. I don't know why you need to be always shakin' your head."

For answer Mrs. Berry shook it again. The letter was to her this time, and she had opened it at once in the post-office and waited for Hetty Woodward's duties to be over in order to share it with her. The store, at mail-time, was a busy scene, but now the crowd had disappeared and the two women were almost alone. Hetty was on her official side of the counter. She was always willing to give Simon Berry a lift in waiting on such customers as remained after the mail was distributed, but now the last woman had gone. Simon and his clerk, who was also a silent partner, were busy at

the back of the store, and the two women were undisturbed in their regular, friendly wrangle over their old schoolmate.

"I can't help, Hetty," — Mrs. Berry yielded to a rush of confidence toward the unsafe confidante, — "I can't help feelin' that Joe's wife, *that Gladys*, is about as mean as they make 'em."

"A vampire, do you mean?" asked Hetty, eagerly.

"Law, no," returned Mrs. Berry, smiling; "I never saw one."

"You did, too, Martha. Don't you remember at the movie on Thursday, that woman with the eyes, that acted so snake-like, and made the trouble between Bushman and Bayne?"

"Oh, is that what you mean? Is that what you call a viper?"

"Not a viper, a vampire. Most every play has to have one."

"Well, thank Heaven, most every family don't have to have one, and I hope our poor May Ca'line —" She paused.

"Oh, I think it's awfully excitin'," said Hetty, manifestly charmed by this development. "Has Gladys got big eyes? Her name sounds romantic."

Martha had been one of the few favored ones who had met the young bride on Joe's brief wedding trip.

"Yes, indeed, if that's all you want for your vampire. They're big and black as they ever come."

"It sounds like it," declared Hetty, tucking her hair behind her ears. "Your suspicions is very excitin', Martha."

"Law, Hetty," said her suddenly repentant friend, "they ain't *suspicions*, they're *guesses*, and they ain't

worth two cents. You know we can talk over these things together without doin' any harm, but you know how great a matter a little fire kindleth. It might make a lot o' mischief for you to say anything about Joe's wife to any of the old neighbors."

"Oh, I should n't think of such a thing."

"Yes, but you might do it without thinkin'. I'm a silly woman to have put such thoughts into your head."

Miss Woodward's gaze was abstracted. "I could write a movie plot on it," she said. "They pay well for ideas."

"I should think they would. There's so few in the world," returned Mrs. Berry caustically. "Now, listen, Hetty —"

"There's the handsome hero, — Joe Laird's a beauty, whatever else he may be, — marries too early, finds out too late his wife is a vampire" (how Hetty luxuriated in that word!) — "sends for his mother — mother an angel and very young and good-lookin', but miserably poor and hungry. Thinks she's gettin' into a safe harbor, finds the vampire bringin' up her son's children to be worse than herself, and besides, is carryin' on secret connivin's with other men —"

"Hetty Woodward, you stop!"

"She proves to be an *Italian* — her black eyes ought to have warned him. She's risen from an *Italian* slum to be a stenography, and she's in league with the Black Hand, and she hates her mother-in-law —"

"Hetty Woodward, stop this minute! You can write as many theatricals as you want to, only don't read 'em to *me*; and do, for the land's sake, take it out in writin'; don't say anything to anybody. My no-

account imaginin's might bring some trouble to May Ca'line; and if we did make it any harder for her —"

Mrs. Berry paused because a stranger entered the store, and seeing Hetty behind the counter advanced to where the two women had their heads together.

He was a young, dapper, city man, with an assured manner, and he lifted his hat with an air which instantly fascinated Hetty. She afterward likened his advent to a fresh breeze coming across a sandy desert.

"Pardon me for disturbing you, ladies, but I think there is a letter here for me."

"What name?" asked Hetty. She felt it was a cold and heartless rejoinder to make to one so debonair, but the Government paid her for just such hauteur.

"Willis Frothingham," he responded. And Hetty, vanishing behind the pigeon-holes, found a letter for him and produced it.

"Kind o' warm day, ain't it?" she said.

The young man might have assented and departed. She was afraid he would.

"I was wonderin' who that letter was *for*," she pursued graciously; "I usually know everybody in Leacock."

"And I hope you will know me," was the charming reply. "I am obliged to stay here for a while."

"I don't know as it's very complimentary for you to put it that way," returned the postmistress coyly.

"Oh, of course, it will be a pleasure," returned Mr. Frothingham gallantly, "but it would increase my anticipation if I knew that I was going to have a bed and three meals a day. You know that *does* help." He beamed upon the two ladies with an excellent set

of teeth. His hat was still in his hand, revealing his thinning but scrupulously brushed blond hair.

"Well, have n't you been to the hotel?" asked Hetty.

"Yes — that's the reason I'm worried. I had lunch there, or was it dinner? I think it was dinner. You see, there were flies. I hope you don't mind my mentioning it. I thought if some lady like yourself would perhaps take me in — "

"'T ain't that I would n't be pleased to accommodate you, but you know how it is with us professional women. We don't have the time to look after our homes as we should. It ain't that I don't love my home, because I do, but my duty lays elsewhere. I'm the post-mistress, you see. Now, right under your nose, Mr. Frothingham," added Hetty archly, "sets the best cook in Leacock. Meet Mrs. Berry, wife of the proprietor."

Simon Berry had been growing increasingly curious concerning the well-dressed stranger, and now he approached.

"Could you be induced, Mrs. Berry?" besought Mr. Frothingham. "If you only knew how hungry I am."

Simon Berry's eyes stared coldly as he drew near and heard this fervent speech. Hetty, fearing some rudeness to one who promised such a desirable break in the monotony of village life, hastened to speak.

"This is Mr. Frothin'ham, Mr. Berry, Mr. *Willis* Frothin'ham," she added, as if the Christian name threw all the light on the subject that was necessary.

"Mr. Berry, you come in the nick of time," said the stranger, astonishing the worthy Simon by shaking hands with him.

"This young man wants we should take him to board," explained Martha.

"We don't take boarders," was the gruff rejoinder, as Mr. Berry regained possession of his hand.

"That makes me all the more crazy to come," declared the young man cheerfully. "You see, Mrs. — Mrs. —" He looked at Hetty inquiringly.

"Miss Woodward," explained Hetty graciously.

"Miss Woodward — pretty name — no wonder you were not willing to change it! This lady confided to me that your wife is the best cook in town."

"He's one o' these here confidence men," decided Simon mentally.

"I s'pose you think we're pretty green out here," he sneered coldly.

"Oh, of course, I mean to give you all sorts of references," said the stranger hastily, while Hetty burned with indignation against Simon; "but I tell you frankly as man to man, if I have to live at that hotel I shall be tempted to go back on my bargain. It's a pretty town you have here, and I thought I'd found just about what would suit me, but I draw the line — I do draw the line at another experience like my meal of an hour ago. Of course, I might hire a small boy to sway a long fan over me during dinner."

"He says it's flies, Simon," explained Martha, who was prepossessed by the young man's frank, boyish manner.

"What you doin' here?" demanded Simon bluntly.

"Buying a summer place."

The answer was so totally unexpected that a short, stunned silence ensued.

Simon Berry's expression slowly became alert. Of course, if this was a matter which involved future customers, he did n't wish to behave in a manner bad for

trade, but caution must still be observed. Anybody could make a real estate deal a cloak for foul play. The question was whether this young man's nerve was backed by a bank account, or whether his debonair and assured manner covered the intention to annex that of other people.

Hetty had instant visions of Leacock, bursting like a butterfly from its dull chrysalis, and becoming a summer resort.

"Yes, we've got a very pretty town here," she said, with an assumption of nonchalance. "It's quite lively and entertainin' at times. We've got an elegant movie theater, painted up snow-white, — you may have noticed it."

Mr. Frothingham nodded with an air of interest. "Yes, yes, indeed, I did. We do, though, have movie theaters in town, and we do not have such trees, such space, such breeze — in short, such possibilities of — of — country life."

Simon's face brightened. "Had you thought of any special property?"

"I had, yes; I went to see it this morning." Three pairs of eyes sought his eagerly. "This place used to be owned by a Mrs. Laird. I'm a lone lorn bachelor and I think it will just suit me."

A gasp of astonishment breathed from his listeners.

"I knew it!" thought Simon. "He ain't any more goin' to buy that forlorn, ramshackle place than I be."

One look at the proposed purchaser revealed such evidence of prosperity as to make the proposition ridiculous. Whereupon Willis Frothingham went on to speak of the man in the next village who had foreclosed the mortgage and to speak of other people con-

nected with the affair until even Simon Berry, clever as he was, was convinced that there must be something in it.

"You can get prettier places than that," said Martha.

"Well, there are points about the Laird place that I like," returned the young man. "I see possibilities. There are a few fine trees, the land at the back runs down to a brook, and I'm especially fond of a brook. This one flings an arm, as it were, about the little place and sings as it goes, and there is a tangle of wild flowers along its banks that is very alluring. It is real country."

Simon listened to this burst of enthusiasm with a skeptical and lowered brow.

"You must n't tempt me with any other place, because I feel sure I should come back to this. My mind is made up, you see."

"Not till the deed is signed," said Simon.

"It is signed," was the still more surprising response.

Simon blinked. In order to be on the safe side he yielded to the stranger's importunities and agreed that he should remain under his roof for the present, but privately he determined to listen alertly for the first sign of the man's real designs in Leacock.

When Simon and his wife were alone that night in the privacy of their chamber, he relieved his feelings. "There's something fishy about all this, Martha, as sure as you're a foot high."

"Sh, sh, Simon, these walls are thin. Wa'n't he a perfect gentleman at supper?"

"Of course; the worst of 'em are always the smoothest. That Laird place anybody would say is one o' the last in town to sell. It'll take an awful sight o' money to put it in livable shape. You know that."

"Well, don't you worry about it, Simon," said his wife pacifically. "Perhaps they've found oil on it."

Her husband amazed her by staring into her eyes excitedly and grabbing her arm. "Mebbe they have!" he ejaculated.

"Nonsense, Simon Berry, nonsense," she returned, laughing. "Let go my arm. I was only joking."

"Many a true word spoken in jest," he returned. "I tell you there's some explanation. A young, prosperous city man ain't comin' out here, where even the automobiles skip through if they've got enough gas, and buy a neglected, weedy place like May Ca'line's. There's some explanation, mark my word. Willis Frothin'ham don't want that place no more than a toad wants a tail."

"Well, I would n't lay awake over it, Simon."

He looked abstracted. "If there's oil there, why should n't there be oil here?" he said. And though his wife pooh-poohed and laughed at him again, he stared at the ceiling long after she had begun to snore.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE RIDDLE

WILLIS FROTHINGHAM proved to be a very stirring body in the quiet pool of Leacock. Hetty Woodward took pains with her coiffure every day now, and looked forward to mail-time with all the ardor of the seventeen-year-old belles of the village.

Simon Berry's bald head and chin whiskers were often seen peering about his boarder's newly acquired property. He neglected his business to pace off May Ca'line's sunburnt grass, and wander down back of the house over the decline to the brook-side. He viewed the clear, gurgling water, rippling over its pebbles, with puzzled brow, and stooping, picked up a handful of its mica-flecked sand.

"They may be placer-minin' here some day," he muttered, his chin whiskers sticking out defiantly. "He can't fool me. There's somethin' here more'n we see."

While he was thus cogitating one morning, Frothingham sauntered up to him with his hands in his pockets. "I see you agree with me," he said pleasantly; "nothing prettier than a brook. Heat can't scare the wild flowers away from its banks, and that low spot where the rushes flourish I'll warrant show plenty of *fleurs de lis* in the right season."

Simon Berry turned a frowning gaze upon the complacent owner. "You can't make me believe you care a darn for wild flowers," he responded deliberately.

"My dear Mr. Berry." The boarder laughed toward the jutting chin-whiskers (it was almost too tempting to have them so near). "Why should n't I? Does n't everybody?"

"Oh, of course, you can keep your own counsel; only I'll let you understand, right now, I ain't fooled. I leave that to the women-folks."

Frothingham laughed again, and linking his arm through that of the baffled Simon, swung him around until they viewed the house.

"A forlorn-looking place," he remarked.

"Don't you s'pose I know that?" retorted the other. "No doubt you're sayin' to yourself, 'Here's Simple Simon all right,' but that's where you make a mistake, young man. I'm onto you. That's what I am — *onto you*."

"It seems as if you must know something about this place that I don't," said Frothingham. "Is it haunted? Why should I come here to lay the ghost?"

"That's your lookout, and you know darned well why you're doin' it. No, I don't know anything about the place that you don't; but you know somethin' about it that I don't, and 't would n't hurt if you should tell me. I hain't come to be over fifty years old without learnin' how to keep a secret."

Willis Frothingham's fair face, beneath the thinning blond hair, was the picture of bland and surprised innocence.

"Why, it's no secret. I told you. I want to fix up the old place for a summer home."

"Well, you can go where it's a damned sight hotter than summer, then, and stay there; you need n't waste all that mush about brooks and wild flowers on me. I

wa'n't born yisterday. Automobiles do sometimes run out o' gas and stop here. I may have hayseed in my whiskers, but I knew the sort you were the minute I clapped eyes on ye. You need n't laugh in your sleeve at *me*, 'cause you've never took me in for one minute." Mr. Berry was quite red in the face by this time and he tried to jerk his arm away, but in vain. His boarder held it as in a vise.

"On the contrary, you took me in; if you had n't I don't know what would have become of me. I should have done some desperate deed, drowned myself in the brook, probably."

"Yes," drawled Simon, with biting sarcasm, — "the ripplin' brook that stretches an arm protectin'ly around the place. That stuff goes with Hetty Woodward. She writes verses for the 'Eagle.' Don't you s'pose I know you'd rather see one highball than all the brook water in existence? H'm."

"See here, Mr. Berry, I don't see why you slam your village the way you do."

"It ain't slammin' the village; it's your choosin' this ramshackle *place*, when I keep tellin' you there are —"

"But, man alive, remember ramshackle places go cheap. Are n't you shrewd enough to think of that? I'm no millionaire."

"Well — of course," — responded Simon exasperated, — "I'm also shrewd enough to think a little farther than the end o' my nose. Look here, mebbe I'd ought not to ask it, but have you got a par'litic father or a — no offense, but you bein' a member of the family as it were — or mebbe a half-witted sister that you're plannin' for, with a quiet sort of a — now — an asylum like?"

Frothingham bit his lip. "I shall have to deny it," he returned. "I have n't that excuse."

Simon pulled away his sympathizing hand, and his mouth resumed its hard line. "Then you want 'em to believe you're just a plain fool."

"Why, I was assured that there were a few good trees, and the brook."

"Look here," said Simon in a sort of solemn rage, "do you mean that you bought this God-forsaken place without having seen it?"

Meekly the culprit nodded. "It sounded so good," he said. "The brook —"

"Damn the brook!" shouted Simon Berry. "It is, then, just the way I thought. There's somethin' fishy about the whole deal. Your name's against you. Frothin'ham — Froth, that's what you're givin' us, and expectin' us to swallow it."

"You forget the ham, Mr. Berry. Ham is a good nourishing substance," suggested the other mildly.

"You hain't any more idea o' plankin' down thousands o' dollars to fix up that worm-eaten house and these overrun grounds than I have. You're after somethin' else here. Now, what is it? Is there oil in the ground, or gold in that blarsted brook? I shall know sometime, and you might as well tell me now."

"Mr. Berry, you are perfectly delightful, and what an appetite for dinner we shall have after this pleasant little argument." The speaker endeavored again to link his arm in that of his host, but Simon jerked away. "Now, just to show you that you're mistaken, and that I'm all ham and no froth, I'm going to get information from you this minute as to the advisability of employing village labor. What about your carpenters?"

Have you any workmen fit to tackle that house, put on the new roof, and so forth?"

"Oh, yes, you can talk about carpenters, and then find fault with this one and that one, gainin' time and puttin' off."

"Guess again," said Frothingham, and this time the hand he laid on the other's shoulder could not be unseated. Simon scowled and wriggled, but his captor laughed and held on.

"Not till you tell me the best man for the business. The work shall begin to-morrow."

There was no mistaking the determination in the new owner's face. Simon, the tormented, stared for a skeptical moment.

"To-morrow?" he said. "To-morrow?" he repeated.

Willis, laughing, and dropping his hand, said, "Lead me to him."

A week later Simon addressed his wife meditatively; "You bet I'm glad I never really insulted him," he said. "He's a fool, but it'll put money in our pocket to have him settle here, so I s'pose I'm another to quarrel with my bread and butter. Look at the folks he's hired. The hotel's filled up with 'em. The new roof's goin' on, an' the way they're workin' over them grounds is a caution."

"Dear May Ca'line! What would she say?" said Martha.

"She's got common sense, so I guess she'd say what I do. Why not build a new cottage?"

"I did find out one thing about him," said Martha, lowering her voice; "I come across some of his business cards in his room and I took one. I did n't think it was any harm, but I guess I ought to put it back."

"Let me see it." Simon swooped upon the bit of pasteboard which his wife took from behind the pin-cushion. He read:—

WILLIS FROTHINGHAM

ARCHITECT

Suite 1111 — Broadway Building

"I did n't know as architects was so rich," said Martha, still in a hushed voice. "I've felt all along he was doin' this for a bride."

Simon gazed at the card in silence. Architects neither bored for oil nor mined for gold. He drew a long breath. "All right, if any girl is fool enough to marry such a haphazard critter, let her do it, have a large family, and trade at my store!"

## CHAPTER XV

### HETTY'S LETTER

DEAR MAY CAROLINE: —

It's a good thing that I have the pen of a *ready* writer; for I don't believe Martha hardly ever writes to you. Of course writing so much for the papers as I have makes it easy for me to throw off a *letter*, and she's busy with housework; and especially *now* that she's keeping *boarders*. Ain't that a surprise? 'Tain't the school-teacher either. I suppose you did n't think anybody'd ever want to board in Leacock, more than the drummers to the hotel. *Well*, let me tell you the time ain't far off when boarding in Leacock in summer-time will be *all the go*. I've got so much to tell you I'm nearly bursting; and this time I did say to Martha, let me be the one to tell May Caroline, and she was only too *glad* to have me, 'cause it's a cross to her to write.

When the movie theater set up here and the lamps across the front looked so elegant along the snowy exterior, I said to myself, "It looks like a sign of waking up." *Well*, I guess it was. At any rate, we're awake.

I'll go back to the beginning. One day Martha and me was having a little talk after the mail was distributed and there was nobody else in the store, when all at once in walked a young *man*. If you'd seen him, May Caroline, dressed just grand in a light gray suit and so handsome and *elegant*. He asked for a letter for Willis Frothingham. *Well*, I handed it out. I'd been wondering who would claim it, and he began to talk with us just like an old friend. He'd spent the night at the hotel and the flies in the dining-room had got on his *nerves*, and it *seems* he'd set his heart on living at *my* house 'cause he was going to stay a while in Leacock. *Well*, you can see how it was. I could n't take him for *many* reasons [here May Ca'line smiled at a mental picture of Miss Woodward's abode]. First place, it would n't *look* very well for us to be living there alone, and second place, a profeshunal woman has to be away so much. *Well*, to make a long story short, Martha took him. Simon acted as *crabbed* as he always

does, but this man was the kind that would melt a graven image and he melted that old grouch of a Simon Berry.

Now, if you guessed one thousand times you would n't guess what brought *him*, a *bachelor* — oh, I suppose about thirty-five — to a little inland town like ours. Well, I'll tell you. It was to buy a summer home. Then it would take you another thousand guesses, maybe *two*, to guess what place he's bought. Well, I'll tell you. It's *yours*. We all think it's the queerest thing that could ever happen in this world. Of course it was a pretty home *once*. I ain't meaning to hurt your feelings, May Caroline, but just as a business proposition, as Simon says, it looks as if Mr. Frothingham should have a *manager*. He talks just beautiful about the brook and those three big trees — you'd think they was the only trees in New England to listen to him go on. It makes Simon as mad as a hornet to hear him. He believes in folks getting their money's worth, and every day he finds out some new plan of Mr. Frothingham's and he growls and says a fool and his money are soon parted.

He's ordering furnishings for the house. Everything cleaned out, woodwork fixed up, and new furniture and *rugs* ordered.

A person he called a decorator came out here. All your old paper is peeled off, May Caroline. Every room is going to be fixed up with something he calls a color skeem. I did n't like to show my ignorance, so I did n't ask much. I just heard Mr. Frothingham and this man talking about it, but you better believe I don't miss a great deal up there and I'll keep you informed. One thing *sure*, it's going to be the grandest, *sweetest* home for miles around.

Every girl in town is chasing after him, but he gets out of all the invitations. He tells them he's a man of one idea till he gets this job done, then he's going to give a *rousing* dance in the hall; so they are all looking forward to that. Tell Joe he'll have to send you out here when the last stroke is done. I'll introduce you to Mr. Frothingham. He will be interested to see the old owner of what he calls his *nest*. I asked him if he knew Joe Laird, but he does n't.

Good-bye for this time, May Caroline. I'm in a hurry to get your letter so don't forget

Your loving friend

HETTY WOODWARD

May Ca'line sat for a long time with the letter in her lap. Tears gathered slowly in her eyes and dropped unnoticed on the paper. Her thoughts went back over all the years in that home where she went as a bride. She thought with tenderness and compassion of the young girl who strove daily, and at last successfully, to put away the thought of that other man who for a time had held such a temptation to her to break her troth. She thought of the yearnings that had beset her when she discovered that her honest, kindly Joseph would never share any of her own aspirations. She remembered how quickly he fell asleep if she attempted to read to him, and how blank was the expression of his face if she began to discuss any subject of the day which traveled beyond the confines of the county seat. She remembered how the final victory over temptation came with the arrival of little Joe. She recalled his development and her joy at his responsiveness. What happiness had been hers!

So the old home was gone. Every feature changed beyond recognition. May Ca'line closed her eyes in endurance of pain as she recalled the looks of it all in those last desperate, threadbare months. Was the present situation any better? It was only the natural sunniness of her disposition which made it possible to forget for moments that her darling boy was being deceived by a woman who hated her and wished her away. No amount of optimistic reasoning could keep that terror from rushing back on her at times.

She tried to show Joe Hetty's letter as they sat alone one morning at the breakfast-table, but as usual he was in a great hurry. "Can't you tell me what is in it?" he asked.

"Yes." May Ca'line's voice was so serious and her heavy eyes so pensive as she replied that he repented.

"Of course, if it is important enough —" he began.

"No, dear. Probably not important to anybody but me. The old house is sold, that's all."

"Is that a fact? I thought Holcomb would have that on his hands for a generation."

"According to Hetty some grand gentleman has bought it and is making it into an ideal summer home. Hetty says" — the speaker paused and swallowed the largest lump of her experience — "says he is in love with the brook and the trees — your brook, Joe."

Her son forgot the morning paper and the day's work for the moment. His mother's eyes were bright with tears, which she held back bravely.

"Could n't have got on without that brook, could I? It was a regular nurse for you, honey, and you never minded how wet we got. Now, if I could have hung on to that mortgage for you, you would be on Easy Street. The purchaser must be of the genus, 'the world forgetting and by the world forgot!' Who does Miss Woodward say he is?"

"Mr. Willis Frothingham."

"*Frothingham!*" repeated Joe in italics. "Oh, but it could n't be the same. The Willis Frothingham I know of is an architect coming into fashion and on the top of the wave. It is to laugh to think of Frothingham in Leacock. I don't know him, but I've seen him often."

"They are making it all over, even the grounds, Joe. Bay-windows, sleeping-porches, and grand new furniture."

"Well, Leacock is looking up, is n't it?" Joe rose and came around to his mother's chair and put his arms

about her. "You don't care, do you, dear?" he said softly. "Think of that last evening we had together there. Was n't it a good visit? Yet, we would n't see it again looking like that, would we?"

May Ca'line clung to him and a tremor swept over her. "I could n't see it looking any other way, Joe. Don't ever let me go to Leacock again. Don't let me."

"I forbid it right now." The speaker laughed and shook her gently. "Do you hear? Don't you dare to go to Leacock. That chapter is closed — closed."

"It was n't all a sad chapter, Joe?" The question was piteous.

"I should say not. I have n't had any sprees since that were one half as much fun as some I had there. Good-bye, there's Nora, be good children!" He patted a little shoulder once more and fled.

This was another morning when May Ca'line could not stay in the house.

While the three others were at breakfast she left the house and sallied forth into the summer day. Entering the park she moved toward the bench which always attracted her from its associations. Her pamphlet was in her hand. She had grown to love it.

May Ca'line had been reading and thinking some time when a voice behind her caused her to straighten up with some excitement of association.

"Why, good-morning," it said in a tone of surprise. "What an apparition."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Chetwyn," returned a second voice. "Of course, you are astonished, but I went to your house and the maid told me you were here. I was determined to find you if I tramped over every square

foot of ground in the place. What luck to find you almost the first thing!"

A wall of high shrubbery behind May Ca'line's bench concealed the speakers, but she was within four feet of them and she had by this time recognized that the Certain one was again her neighbor. She listened acutely. All fear of eavesdropping was remote from her. Her whole mind was concentrated on the determination not to let her friend escape her again. If she should arise and go away with the owner of the second voice May Ca'line would jump up and run after her and beg for her address. She was sure that the Certain one would remember her and respond to her need; but there was no sound of moving.

"What did you want of me so early in the morning, Miss Vivian?" went on the voice that was music in the listener's ears.

"I wanted to tell you about Ferdy."

"How is the dear boy?"

"No better and growing so capricious and strange. Oh, Mrs. Chetwyn, how heavenly a home is with no sickness in it!"

"Yes, my dear. Tell me all. Do you mean that your father has consented to my help?"

"No, oh, no; he is as afraid of your ideas as ever. That does not hurt your feelings, does it, Mrs. Chetwyn? I'm so unhappy I have to be very honest."

The Certain one gave a little laugh, which May Ca'line thought one of the most loving sounds she had ever heard.

"That is entirely right, my dear, but it is even possible to be happy and honest."

"I feel that you are a monument of strength. You

know that; and when I come to a very hard place you are the first one I think of."

"I'm glad to help. What is it now?"

"Why, Ferdy does n't like the gayety at Rose Ledge. You may believe me that he is on my mind so much I would *rather* have it all quiet if father would consent, but it hurts him, so I'm through asking it. Ferdy is in it, but not of it out there. Think of the feelings of a strong young college boy, laid out in a wheeled chair like an old man."

"I don't like to," was the response.

"At last he made up his mind he wanted to be moved in to the town house. So his apartments were made ready and he is there. He does n't want to see visitors, not even me, Mrs. Chetwyn."

May Ca'line heard a choking sound, and a sympathetic murmur.

"Daddy drops in on him every day, but the doctor always tells us to humor Ferdy. He says nervousness is a woman—capricious. He says you can have a hysterical spine. Did you ever hear of such a thing as a hysterical bone? He says he knew of a great, burly policeman who had a stiff knee that could n't be cured. He had to ride, and his leg stuck right out when he was on a horse, so at last the doctors decided on an operation. He was put under the anæsthetic and as soon as they lifted him to take him to the table, that knee bent just like the other one. It was a hysterical knee. Well, all we can do is to obey the doctor and humor Ferdy, but at last he has expressed a wish. He wants some one to come in and read to him for a while every day. I've read to him hours myself, of course, but he finally refused to let me. He said he knew I ought to be doing

something else and he was sure he was keeping me from people."

The voice stopped with a sudden choke again and the other answered: "I see just how hard it has been for you, dear Miss Vivian. Did you want me to help you find a reader?"

"Yes, Mrs. Chetwyn. It sounds easy, but it is going to be very hard to find any one to suit Ferdy. He has laid down the law against any young person, and yet a middle-aged or elderly person who would want such a position could hardly be expected to be cheerful, or if she were, it would be that put-on kind that Ferdy would see through at once. I told you, did n't I, when I called you up the other day, that his eyes have to be bandaged now? The sight has been examined and seems to be all right, only so frightfully sensitive that light gives him pain that he can't bear. Oh, Mrs. Chetwyn! I have to be so bright before father and with my friends, it is such a comfort to sit here and just speak out all the things I think about so much and can never voice. It is so much harder for a boy than for a girl to have this breakdown. If Ferdy could only be robust and taking his place with the other boys this summer, I'd lie in that wheeled chair for years!"

And upon this the speaker broke down and had the most comfortable cry she had known for many a month.

"You — you can see — what it means to me — to have — this estrangement with Ferdy. To — to think that — he does n't want to see me."

"I understand, dear. I see it all. I'm glad you came to me, for I shall hope to have good news to send you soon. If that position is open, there is some one who

belongs in it like the square peg in the square hole. We have only to find him."

"Or her," said Vivian. "I think older women are more apt to be cheerful than older men." She caught her breath. "I must go now." She pulled her motor veil over her flushed face. "Can I take you anywhere, Mrs. Chetwyn?"

How May Ca'line listened for the answer to this! No bird ever poised more ready for flight than she on the edge of her bench.

"No, thank you, Miss Vivian. I'm going to stay here and do a little work."

May Ca'line sat back and prayed the most fervent prayer of her life. She scarcely heard the last interchange between the two friends. She heard light steps move away on the gravel, and as soon as they were no longer audible, she started from her place and fled quickly around the shrubbery.

"Mrs. Chetwyn!" she exclaimed, standing panting with excitement before the Certain one, "I'm so thankful to find you! So thankful! Don't you remember me? I'm here again."

## CHAPTER XVI

MRS. CHETWYN

AS the small whirlwind came around the shrubbery and faced her, Mrs. Chetwyn looked up with a start from the book she had just opened. The eager, tremulous, bright-eyed person accosting her was so different from the weeping one she had once befriended that at first she did not recognize her, and May Ca'line saw it.

"You remember you talked with me on that bench by the water one morning. You gave me three rules of life, and this" — the speaker held out the pamphlet — "and I let you go without finding out your name or where you lived and I felt despairing about it; but I've read and read — look at the little book! — and I've tried very hard —"

She paused, and Mrs. Chetwyn smiled up at the eager, appealing face.

"Sit down," she said, and May Ca'line obeyed. "How have things gone?"

"I'm still unwelcome. I'm still frightened at the situation, but it does n't seem right to talk it over with my son. I still feel that I'm cumbering the ground. If you knew how I long to do something useful — something to earn money, you would know how excited I have been the last ten minutes."

May Ca'line's eyes devoured the calm ones that faced her.

"You mean you overheard our conversation?"

"Yes. I recognized your voice and my one thought was not to let you get away until I could speak to you again. I never thought of listening to the conversation. I did n't care about that until I heard the wonderful things the other lady said."

Mrs. Chetwyn began to feel that this was a sadder case than she had realized. What was there in what Vivian Breed had said to cause the radiance in the face of this faded little person? Her troubles must have unbalanced her.

"What made me come here this morning?" went on May Ca'line fervently. "What made you come here? What made that lady find you sitting where I could n't help overhearing what she said? It was this" — the speaker again held out the well-worn pamphlet — "and praying to God every day to give me strength to live by the three rules. He has heard me."

Mrs. Chetwyn regarded her companion in touched silence. Her face, her speech, her manner all betokened refinement. It was plain to Mrs. Chetwyn's perception that, sane or not, this little woman was a lady. The joyous and still lovely eyes seemed calling upon her now to rejoice with them.

"I think I don't quite understand you," she returned at last.

"Why — of course, you don't. I'm afraid I'm too happy to talk straight and it may sound very conceited too, but unless you know of some one who needs that position worse than I do, and can fill it, there is nobody who could read to that boy better than I can."

Mrs. Chetwyn felt a pang of compassion. "You?" she said gently. "I don't even know who you are."

"No, but I'm Mrs. Joseph Laird, from Leacock. You

can write there and find out about me. The two things I love best in the world are boys and reading, and I'm old — a great deal older than I feel — and as for cheerfulness — I'm the most foolishly cheerful person in the world when I'm not crying. I have n't had anything to be cheerful about in years, and yet it is just as natural to me as to breathe."

The testimony of the worn pamphlet, the childlike honesty of the beseeching eyes, and the musical voice all began to win Mrs. Chetwyn's confidence. "If it is right you will have the position," she said quietly. "Of course I must make inquiries."

"Certainly." May Ca'line gave a little half-hysterical sound. "I'm so dreadfully respectable that it makes me laugh. What would my boy say to have me 'looked up'? Oh, Mrs. Chetwyn, don't you think it would be all right for me not to tell Joe? — Joe's my boy."

"You have n't the position yet, remember."

"No, but you said there was somebody to fit it as the square peg fits the square hole. That's me. And God sent me here. I'm sure of it. Won't you come right home with me now and see where I live? It is only a little way, and see my grandchildren? They're dreadfully naughty and I'm not allowed to say a word. Think of getting away from there every day and doing something to help somebody! Oh, God is good!"

Mrs. Chetwyn regarded her quietly, but inwardly she said: "You are a little dear and saner than the average, I fancy."

"Why don't you want to tell your boy?"

"Because he's the best son in the world and it might make him feel that I considered that he could n't take care of his mother. He has little idea of what I suffer

in his house, but he has some, for he told me I might have a room outside any time I wished."

"Why don't you go, then?"

"Because of the man I told you of. He has n't so much freedom to come to the house when I am there; but — but she goes out with him without her husband's knowledge. I can't think about it. I don't dare to think about it."

"What does your son do?"

"He is secretary to a rich railroad man."

"You must n't be too excited about this, Mrs. Laird. It does look like a leading; but even if I decide to let you try, a disappointment may await you. Our dear boy is very capricious."

"Yes, yes, I know." May Ca'line clasped her hands tight and her breath caught.

"We would n't want any one too excitable. It would annoy him very much."

"No; oh, I would n't be. Mrs. Chetwyn, please don't despise me for conceit, but nobody can tell me how to act with a boy whether he's sick or well."

"This young man has had a year in college; he is not a child, you know."

"Yes; my boy is n't either, but — but they're all children, Mrs. Chetwyn."

"Very true," that lady smiled. "I am no kin to these people, but before I was married I was a trained nurse, and about seven years ago I took care of this young man through a severe illness. He had no mother, and his father was grateful for his recovery and the family have all been very friendly to me ever since, although they do not approve of my change of thought about life since that time. Mr. Breed is especially opposed."

"What — what name did you say?" asked May Ca'line, the eager expression of her face changing.

"Mr. Breed. It is his son Ferdinand who is ill."

"Is he — in the railroad business?"

"Yes, in the X. & Y. Road."

"He is Joe's employer, then!"

Mrs. Chetwyn regarded her companion in surprise. The alteration in her appearance was similar to that which comes to a rose-colored balloon when it is pricked.

"But I don't think," she returned reassuringly, "that your boy need know on that account. Laird is not an unusual name. Mr. Breed would probably not connect you with his secretary."

May Ca'line's expressive face was a study. "Fear not, is one of the rules," she said, as if to herself.

"Certainly, fear not," returned her friend, somewhat mystified. She smiled: "You behave as if you stood in some awe of your dear boy. Would it be so portentous a thing if he should hear about this matter?"

May Ca'line did not answer for a minute. Memory had carried her back to the gate of her uncle's house in Leacock one summer night, and she heard again the last words she ever said to the young fellow who stood there appealing to her: —

"You must n't say one word more, Adam, and I must n't. I'm going to marry Joseph."

She came to the realization of her surroundings with a start.

"Mrs. Chetwyn," she said, "do you believe God sent me here this morning? Do you believe it is a leading?"

"We can only look to Him and take our steps trustingly. I will call up Miss Breed this afternoon and tell

her that I have found some one who seems fitted for the work. She will leave it all to me. I can take you to the house to-morrow and you can give young Mr. Breed a sample of your reading and see how he likes it."

"Oh, I hope I won't meet his father!"

"Why?" Mrs. Chetwyn had another wave of doubt. This little woman seemed so extremely odd and changeable.

"I — I stand in a little awe of him. I think Joe does. He has made me feel that way."

"It is n't at all likely that you will ever see him."

"Would you mind, Mrs. Chetwyn, not telling Miss Breed that I am Joe's mother? She knows Joe. He might feel, as I said, that it reflects on him for his mother to go out and earn money."

Mrs. Chetwyn was puzzled. Where was all the eagerness and radiance of a few minutes ago? "This is a strange situation," she said at last. "I have no proof of your identity, you know."

May Ca'line took Hetty's letter from between the leaves of the pamphlet and passed it to her friend. It was post-marked Leacock and addressed to Mrs. Joseph Laird. She still seemed somewhat abstracted and not troubled by any concern as to the identification.

"I don't suppose a person can be very good and very human, too, can she?" she said. "To be very humble and not have any false pride takes something much higher than human nature, does n't it?"

Mrs. Chetwyn passed back the letter. "You know who said, 'He that would be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all,'" she returned. "I'm sure your boy, if he is such a fine man as you say, would n't

be so narrow as to prevent your taking a position of this kind provided you can fill it."

"But don't tell him," was the hasty answer.

"No, indeed; that is your privilege."

"And — you'll be kind enough not to tell Miss Breed that I am Joe's mother?"

"Yes. You seem to have become doubtful. Do you still feel that you wish to try the work?"

May Ca'line's eyes returned the other's calm questioning piteously. "It really appeared to be for me," she said. "If I had only to meet the boy!"

Mrs. Chetwyn smiled. "If you are worrying about Mr. Breed, I assure you that if he should come into the room while you were there he would scarcely notice you. His mind is full of grave responsibilities and his heart is wrung by his son's condition."

"Thank you," said May Ca'line meekly. "Then will you walk home with me now, Mrs. Chetwyn?"

"No, I think not. I will call for you to-morrow and take you to the house and introduce you. I will come at two-thirty."

"And may I know where you live, too?"

"Certainly. I shall want to know how you get on, and be glad to give you any help that I can."

They exchanged addresses and then May Ca'line thanked her friend and went away. She saw that Mrs. Chetwyn had intended to read and wished to be alone.

That lady followed the light little figure with her eyes. No one could talk with May Ca'line without feeling her appeal.

As she hurried along the path her heart was beating like a trip-hammer. What amazing brazenness she had

displayed, and how far greater brazenness to-morrow would bring forth. She paused once, and half turned to go back and tell the Certain one that she had changed her mind, and ask her to find some one else for the position. Then she considered that doing that, after her excited and boastful appeal, Mrs. Chetwyn would very naturally decide that such a human weather-cock was either too shallow to be worth while, or else out of her mind.

"I've put my head into the noose," thought May Ca'line. "I must go on with it; but why in the name of everything reasonable, in this great city full of people, did my chance have to come in the one home where I don't want to go!"

She met her daughter-in-law when she went into the house and was surprised by the civil "Good-morning" she received.

"You are very sensible to go out in the cool of the day," said Gladys. "I am going to take my outing this afternoon. One of my friends wants me to go with her to a natatorium, where she teaches swimming. I wondered if you would n't like to take the children to the movie. The picture is going to be a fairy tale, and perhaps you would enjoy it as much as they will. I know you don't like the exciting stuff."

May Ca'line assented and thanked her with a heavy heart. She felt that no fairy tale they could see would be more improbable than that about the swimming school; but she tried to center her thoughts on the opportunity to have the children to herself for a time.

To Gladys now, May Ca'line was the sword of Damocles in human form. She determined to speak her fair and even meditated putting her into the spare room. It

must be her treatment of his mother which had made Joe so cold and changed toward herself of late.

"I said so," thought Gladys bitterly. "No roof is big enough for two families. We were all right until she came."

Her chief concern at present being to bask in Henry Bird's devotion without getting into trouble, she had but lately noted the change in her husband. She was used to his being tired, and at times harassed. His alteration from affectionate demonstration to politeness had touched her but vaguely. Yet at times now she thought upon it. She wanted Henry, but Joe was hers by right. He had often in past days apologized to her for letting her tie herself to one who seemed so little able to rise financially, and she had patronized and forgiven him; but now — perhaps it was his mother's coming and her own perception that the newcomer offered to him a quality more congenial than her own, that made her awake to the great change in her husband from the boy she had married.

Her very safety from Joe's suspicions was an irritation to her vanity, and the more she dwelt on late instances of her husband's indifference, the more imperative grew her jealous need for reassurance.

That night in their room she paused in her preparations for bed and turned toward him. "Joe, I've been having some strange thoughts lately," she said.

Bracing himself mentally he replied lightly, "We all do think occasionally."

"What a queer answer," she said irritably. "Look at me, Joe."

He obeyed. She was not at her best. Suspicion, ready to ripen into resentment, was in her gloomy eyes, and

her full lips looked hard and sullen. She was several years his senior, although her family were the only ones of her present circle in that secret, and at this moment she looked the elder.

"You might express some interest in strange thoughts of mine."

He regarded her resolutely. It was not easy for him.

"Tell me, by all means."

"I've been wondering lately how much you care for me." There was no appeal in her manner, rather accusation. "You're so cold and indifferent lately. I look back and just wonder if you can be the same boy I married."

"All that sort of consideration leads nowhere, does it?" replied Joe. Then, again endeavoring to speak lightly: "You know the old story of catching the street-car. The would-be passenger makes all sorts of efforts to make the car stop, but after he has caught it he would be considered a madman if he continued his gyrations."

"Don't try to be funny, Joe. I just want you to answer me one question. If we were both single to-day would you try to get me to marry you?"

"That is a very dangerous question, Gladys." Her husband turned and faced her with a sudden severe gravity which she involuntarily admired. Gladys was the sort of woman to glory in a man who would beat her.

"It's easy enough answered," she retorted.

"No, it is a very difficult question — a cruel question for parents to be called upon to answer. It should never come up. Supposing I were to ask you if I am your ideal man?"

Gladys could not hold her gloomy, accusing gaze. He saw it and pursued — “If I am the sort of man you admire most in nature and achievement, yes, even financial achievement? You and I have entered into a solemn compact and there are Bob and Ella. The thing for us to do is n’t to question, but to do the best we can every day.”

Gladys, with Henry Bird’s solicitations in her ears, was silenced, but far from convinced. Indeed, a hundred new questions followed upon the last. She had never seen this look in Joe’s eyes. There was command in it, but no love. The boy had changed to a man, and if he ever discovered her risky flirtation he might go to lengths at present undreamed of, lengths which included worse results than a good, honest beating.

She wished for the moment that there were no Henry Bird, and that she could feel as indignant with Joe as he deserved. She tried to lie awake and nurse her injuries and apprehensions; but Nature had not endowed her with that species of nervous system, and she was soon dreaming of a motor ride over a rocky country, where jolts were constant.

## CHAPTER XVII

### TREASURE ISLAND

THE small hours were growing larger before May Ca'line slept that night, and when she awoke it was under a cloud of apprehension. As her mind cleared and she realized that this was the day on which she had deliberately consented to go to Adam Breed's house, she considered not arising at all, and having Nora tell Mrs. Chetwyn when she came that she was ill. More intrepid thoughts prevailed, and as she dressed she consoled herself by the thought that she should probably be so stiff and unlike herself in that dreaded environment that she would be told politely by Mrs. Chetwyn to-morrow that her services would not be required.

"So now," said May Ca'line to herself, "what is there to dread so? Adam is too busy a man ever to come home in the middle of the afternoon, and that is n't home anyway in the summer. If his poor boy should like me I'll get some money, and if he does n't I'll get out of an awful box. He does n't want to see his sister, so she is n't likely to come, and surely I'm not scared of him, poor child, eyes bandaged so he can't even see me. So am I going to act like a perfect idiot, or am I not?"

It had often been said of her by her friends that May Ca'line would joke on her death-bed; and she could see a humorous side to the present situation. Though not exactly *in extremis* now, she felt that if Adam Breed should come in and find her with his son, and recognize

the present travesty on her blooming girlhood, she should die of it then and there.

"My heart just bobs around like an unmanageable puppy that keeps jumping up on one. Down, sir! Down, you stupid little thing!" she muttered as she stood before her foot of mirror, arranging her hair. Fortunately not much mirror was required for this operation. There is hair whose dressing is a solemn matter of tongs and an hour's time. There is another sort of head upon which one sweep of the comb and three hair-pins will evolve a fetching coiffure. Nature had bestowed this priceless boon upon May Ca'line. She put on the serge skirt in which she had made the journey from Leacock and a fresh white blouse.

When she came to the lunch-table Gladys remarked her appearance. "I'm not going to spend the money, though, to take her to the movie again to-day," she thought. "You look as if you were going out," she said.

"Yes, I am going out with a friend I made in the park."

"Oh, a pick-up, eh?"

"Yes, her name is Chetwyn. Do you know of any Chetwyns about here?"

"No. Queer name."

"We have met a few times. She has been very kind to me. I am going out with her this afternoon."

"Going to a show?"

"No, we are going to walk. I should like so much to have her meet you and the children before we go. She is coming here to call for me."

"She'll have to come before matinée time, then. I'm going to let Mae Marsh be nursemaid to the kids this afternoon."

They had gone before Mrs. Chetwyn arrived. She had called up Vivian Breed the night before.

"I think I have found our reader," she said. "She overheard our talk in the park and appeared to me after you left, like a middle-aged dryad leaping out of that elm tree. I had met her there in the park and talked with her before. She is an unusual sort of little woman, very spirited and bright. Her name is Laird. I'm taking her to Ferdy to-morrow afternoon."

"I'm thankful to you," said Vivian; "you know that."

"We'll try the experiment," went on Mrs. Chetwyn, "and see whether your brother turns his thumbs up or down. I'll let you hear as soon as I know, myself."

"Thank you so much," replied the girl again; "I trust it all to you."

Sitting on the porch and waiting, May Ca'line continued to lecture herself. "Fear not, rejoice always, love everybody, Gladys included," she said over and over like a lesson. "Be a mental aviator; stop floundering in the lowlands o' sorrow."

While she thus exhorted herself a handsome limousine car stopped before the door. Mrs. Chetwyn left it and May Ca'line started up in surprise. Somehow the grandeur of the car and chauffeur made everything worse. She longed for some little shell to creep into and be forgotten.

"You did n't expect me to arrive in such style, did you?" Mrs. Chetwyn asked, smiling as she came up the steps. "It is n't my motor; Miss Breed sent it for us. It's ever so much pleasanter than transferring on street-cars, is n't it? She said it was the one they keep in town for her brother to use. It has to be closed on account of his eyes."

"My daughter-in-law and the children have just gone to the *matinée*," faltered May Ca'line. "Won't you come in for a minute and see where we live?"

Her friend assented and they entered the living-room and sat down for a few minutes.

"They have a nice back yard here for the children. Mr. Breed has been very kind. He spoke to Joe of wanting them to have that."

The Certain one's eyes looked kindly at her evidently nervous little companion.

"If you are the right one to make time pass pleasantly for *his* son, you will reward him," she said.

"But" — May Ca'line looked startled — "but you understand the *sub rosa* part of all this, don't you?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Chetwyn, assuming a comic air of mystery. "We know that son Joseph and daughter Vivian are to be kept in the darkest dark on the subject of this great adventure."

May Ca'line knew she was being laughed at, but her knees were shaky, and when her friend arose and suggested that they would better be off, she descended the steps and entered the luxurious car braced as for a visit to a dentist who did not administer gas.

Twenty minutes' drive brought them to a street of fine homes before one of which the car stopped. A woman, perhaps the caretaker, answered Mrs. Chetwyn's ring, and seemed to understand their errand. She ushered them through the wide hall into a reception-room, sheeted and shaded. The large, ghostly chairs and the stillness of everything behind these massive stone walls made May Ca'line feel like holding to Mrs. Chetwyn's pongee skirt.

They waited but a very short time before the return

of the woman, a grave person, who looked as sheeted and shaded as the room, and she led them out through the hall, whose broad stairway seemed to lead to a balcony above. May Ca'line cast a timid glance at the grand austerity of its bronze figures, and immediately the door at the end of the hall opened and a powerful-looking man in immaculate white appeared.

Mrs. Chetwyn greeted him as he stood aside for them to pass, and hastened forward to the side of a wheeled chair. The invalid, with the bandaged eyes and dressed in a loose wrapper, turned his head at their entrance, and May Ca'line noticed that his pale face did not change expression as Mrs. Chetwyn took his limp hand for a minute between her own.

There was nothing sheeted here, though the room was carefully shaded. Bowls of roses stood about, and the walls were filled with books. The leather furniture was luxurious and the great fireplace was banked with growing hydrangeas.

"I have brought my friend, Mrs. Laird, to see you, Ferdy."

The young fellow nodded impersonally. "How do you do, Mrs. Laird," he said in a colorless voice. "Hansen, are you there?"

"Yes, Mr. Breed." The man in white took a step nearer.

"Ladies, this is Mr. Hansen, who bores himself taking care of me."

The two ladies bowed to the nurse, who acknowledged their greeting, and placed a couple of chairs for them.

May Ca'line's heart yearned so over the unsmiling boy that she began to forget herself.

"Your sister told me that in spite of the beauty of Rose Ledge you began to feel that you would be happier here," said Mrs. Chetwyn, her heart aching over the stoicism in the face she had once known so well. It was hard to tell what to say to one who was in such a case and would be so sure to hate platitudes. "I remember that we used to have some very pleasant times in this house when you were convalescing," she added.

"Yes, you were a good scout, Miss Lansing — excuse me, Mrs. Chetwyn — I always think of you as Miss Lansing."

"Mrs. Laird here is very fond of reading, and I'm going to let her try reading to you this afternoon. You know what Marion Crawford said: that a novel is a little pocket theater. Just now you need to have the theater brought to you, so I hope you will enjoy it. Mrs. Laird is a stranger in the city and does n't know her way about yet, so the car will take her home. In an hour shall I say?"

If Ferdy's expression could be said to change, it now indicated doubt.

The nurse spoke respectfully. "I can call the chauffeur when we are ready. Perhaps it would be better not to set any time."

As May Ca'line received her friend's parting smile and saw her disappear, she felt deserted in a sea of deep and heaving waters, but there was a buoy; yes, even in that moment of panic it was entirely characteristic that May Ca'line could make a mental pun, tremor and all. Hansen went to the door with Mrs. Chetwyn. He was so big and white and silent, May Ca'line wished he would get lost among those huge, sheeted chairs that looked made for him.

"I never saw so many books," she said, and at sound of her voice Ferdy turned his head.

"Yes, father has a fine library."

"There is only one thing in the world that I love better."

"What is that?"

"I don't think I'll tell you, Mr. Breed. I hope you'll guess it."

A sort of boyish sternness came over the invalid's face. This musical voice had a thread of tenderness sounding through the last speech. Moreover, it was distinctly girlish.

"I thought it was understood that I did not wish to employ a young person," he said coldly.

"Yes, yes, I did understand it," said May Ca'line reassuringly, "for I'm not young, and I wanted so much to come."

"Why did you wish it so much?"

"Partly to earn money and partly because I love reading, and partly for that other reason that I spoke of."

"That I'm to guess?"

"Only if you wish to, you know, Mr. Breed, but perhaps you can't help it."

"I think you're young," said Ferdy, still more frigidly. "It would be like Vivian to get Mrs. Chetwyn to play a trick on me, thinking to cheer me up, and get Hansen to help them. It's easy to cheat a fellow with bandaged eyes. I wish they could get it through their heads that I still have my mind, and know what I want."

"Mr. Breed, listen." May Ca'line spoke in distress. "Indeed I'm not young. I'm a grandmother. Is that enough?"

The boy sank back against his pillow. "No lie, eh?"

"I have two grandchildren."

"Very well. I beg your pardon. Has Hansen come back?"

"No, not yet."

"He is a Swede with some accent. It makes me nervous to hear him read. That is why I sent for some one."

"I'm glad I could come. It is wonderful to me to see this beautiful house. I've lived in a small town always. What a splendid room you have to be ill in."

"Not much comfort in that."

"Why, I think there is, for of course you remember everything in it."

"See here, did they tell you to be cheerful with me? For let *me* tell you that makes me *sick*."

May Ca'line was glad she could smile unperceived. Her fear had fled. "No, they did n't give me any instructions, but I've been a little homesick since I came to the city and I don't know just what would have happened to me if I had n't met Mrs. Chetwyn, and become acquainted with her and been given her rules of life: Fear not, rejoice always, love everybody, and be a mental aviator."

"Oh, indeed."

May Ca'line thought the invalid tried not to smile at this. How she wished he would!

"Yes; so now to be brought into this beautiful place, so airy and so full of flowers, I'm afraid I can't help being cheerful. Please don't mind. It will pass off. May I bring that bowl of roses for you to smell of?"

Without waiting for permission May Ca'line seized the bowl and held the flowers under the boy's nose. It

was so long since he had been able to believe that proximity to himself and his surroundings was a pleasure, rather than a duty, to anybody, that he suffered the attention for a moment, which May Ca'line was too clever to prolong.

He decided that this person was honest, and her voice was the pleasantest he remembered. When it was chained down to voicing horse-sense it might do very well.

The nurse here returned. His white shoes were so noiseless that May Ca'line understood how his charge could have asked the recent question.

"Had you some special thing in mind that you wanted to hear read?" she asked.

"Oh," Ferdy sighed unconsciously, "anything."

"I've just been aching to look at those books. May I go and pick out something?"

"Certainly. Make yourself at home. — You are young," added Ferdy mentally, hearing the zest in her voice. "Grandmother or no grandmother, you are young."

Had his eyes been unbandaged he would have been more firmly convinced of this, for May Ca'line, after a cursory glance at the lower shelves, ran up the ladder to get a higher view. Hansen's mouth fell open as he watched her.

"Mrs. Laird, I will gladly search for you," he said, scandalized.

"Oh, it's like picking peaches for one's self," rejoined May Ca'line. "Do let me."

"Very well, madam," returned the man, looking from her to Ferdy and back again.

"Would you mind putting my hat somewhere?" —

and Hansen suddenly caught the headgear Martha and Hetty had worked on so laboriously. His eyes grew still larger.

After a minute of searching May Ca'line spoke. "Oh, Mr. Breed, do you know 'Treasure Island' by heart?"

"If I've ever read it I've forgotten. Of course one hears the name all the time."

"Well, I never have read it. I've longed so to read Robert Louis Stevenson, and here he is — all of him! Shall I bring 'Treasure Island' down?"

"Down? Where are you?"

"She's on top of the ladder, sir," said Hansen, and his tone did wring that smile from the invalid for which May Ca'line longed.

"Hansen," said Ferdy, "how old is our visitor?"

"Mr. Breed, sir!"

May Ca'line ran down the ladder. "He can't tell unless he looks at my teeth and I'm not going to let him." She exhibited an even row to Hansen as she said it, for she knew by Ferdy's voice that her excursion ceilingward had amused him.

"You don't know how I anticipate reading this story. Mr. Carnegie overlooked our village when he was distributing libraries. Are you comfortable, and shall I begin?"

"Hansen, you may go off for half an hour. Tell Mrs. Badger to remain in hearing of my bell."

The nurse slowly withdrew, his eyes on May Ca'line to the last. All unconscious, she opened her book and began. "Stop me, won't you," she interrupted herself to say, "if I read too slow or too fast."

The sick boy nodded and she threw a kiss toward his

set, pale face. "Darling child!" she thought, her heart going out to him. "No mother, and nobody but that huge white man for company."

Then they were off. May Ca'line read well. She seemed to be telling the story herself; and her zest in it was evident and infectious. In fact she stopped sometimes to throw in a spontaneous comment, and her listener nodded assent.

The door opened. "That you, Hansen?" asked the invalid with a crispness which suggested impatience.

"Yes, Mr. Breed."

"What is it?"

"It's a half an hour, sir."

"You've looked at your watch wrong."

"Shall I leave you for another half-hour, sir?"

"Of course. Go on, if you please, Mrs. Laird."

May Ca'line went on. Again it seemed but a few minutes before the door opened again.

"That you, Hansen?"

"Yes, Mr. Breed."

"I wish you would n't keep opening and closing that door."

"But Mrs. Laird has been reading an hour, sir. You engaged her for that time, you remember."

"Are you tired, Mrs. Laird?" came the boy's quick question.

"Not in the least, my d—" May Ca'line stopped herself in time. He had had a year in college.

"But, Mr. Breed, it is time for you to eat."

"Then Mrs. Laird will have some tea."

"Mrs. Badger is bringing the tray, sir."

Soon there was a stand beside the wheeled chair and upon it iced tea, hot tea, the daintiest of sandwiches,

small cakes, and a foaming glass of eggnog, which Hansen put into the invalid's hand.

May Ca'line enjoyed the little feast heartily.

"If you praise those sandwiches so much I shall have to eat one," said Ferdy, and May Ca'line held the plate so that it lightly touched his seeking hand. The nurse, standing at the head of the chair, gave her an approving smile.

"The doctor says Mr. Breed may eat anything he fancies," he remarked.

"Reading does make one hungry," said May Ca'line. "My boy always wanted to eat apples while I read to him."

"That's so. I have n't thought of apples for a long time. Hansen, you might get some apples. I'm catching your appetite. I think I'll take something more."

Again Hansen beamed upon the little auburn-haired visitor who met his wide smile with some surprise. He winked and nodded and pointed to the plate where the invalid was taking another of the delicate sandwiches. "Mr. Breed has n't been eating much, madam."

"Neither have I," she returned. "One does n't feel hungry in the hot weather, but this lovely, cool place, and Stevenson, and such a good time altogether, make me ravenous. Do keep me company in one of those delicious little cakes, Mr. Breed."

"I think best not the cake," said Hansen, putting out a repressive hand."

"Rot," said Ferdy. "Did n't you just say I could have anything I liked? It's low-down to offer Mrs. Laird something in my own house that I won't eat myself. Where's the cake?"

May Ca'line nodded reassuringly to Hansen. "You

know how they force a card on you in card tricks," she said. "I'm going to force a cake on you, Mr. Breed."

She pushed a sponge drop toward his hand and he took it.

"Is n't that delicate and delicious?" she asked. Her tone was enough to make any man, even a sick man, hungry.

Suddenly it occurred to her how time must have been flying. Perhaps Adam chose the late part of the afternoon for his daily call. Cinderella at the stroke of twelve did not feel greater panic.

"I — I am staying very late," she said. "I must go home at once."

"You like stories of adventure, don't you?" said Ferdy.

"Love them; and detective stories, and sentimental stories, and humorous stories, and historical stories — everything but sad stories."

While she talked May Ca'line was hastily putting on her hat and gloves.

"Did you ever read the 'Prisoner of Zenda'?" asked Ferdy.

"Never."

"Not when you had a boy to read to!"

"We were n't where we could get modern books. Is it so good?"

"Good! It has all the rest pushed off the platform. We'll read that next."

May Ca'line smiled up at the big, silent Hansen, then at the bandaged eyes. "Am I to come again, then?" she asked.

"Why — of course, — if it does n't bore you too much."

"Bore me! Why, Mr. Breed, I can't tell you what a good time I've had. I've always wished that sometime I could see a big library of books, all together; and this room fills me right up, and the story is so fine, I do want to go on with it."

"At the same time to-morrow, then, the car will call for you."

May Ca'line began to think fast. If this errand were to be kept secret, that limousine could not appear every day before her son's house. "I would just as lief come on the street-car," she said.

"No occasion," returned Ferdy. "I don't wish you to." His tone was that of one whose decision is final.

"Then — then I'm going to ask a very queer favor. You know if my two little grandchildren saw me going away in that car they would want to go too."

"I'm sorry," said the invalid quickly; "I could n't endure children at present."

May Ca'line had a vision of Bob and Ella shrieking around this lordly and dignified room.

"Of course not," she said earnestly. "I was going to ask if I might be called for at a drug-store near by, so the children would n't see the car."

"Certainly, that would be all right."

"Then I can have the chauffeur drop me there when I go back to-day and show him the place — if I'm going in the automobile?" She looked questioningly at Hansen.

"It is waiting, madam."

So May Ca'line, casting an apprehensive glance up and down the street for a young, alert, energetic man with black hair — how fast Adam always walked! — stepped into the car and drove back in state. She

directed the chauffeur to the drug-store and asked him to call there for her at two-thirty the next day.

As she walked the two blocks home, her sense of humor mingled with the ache at her heart inseparable from certain memories. "I've gone into Gladys's class," she thought. "I, too, go around the corner to meet an automobile."

The instant Hansen returned from putting the visitor into the car Ferdy spoke.

"Describe Mrs. Laird to me," he said.

"Well, that's a hard one for a stupid fellow like me," rejoined the nurse.

"Pshaw! Tell me about her. She does n't sound like a grandmother."

"Her sort marries young, sir. I'd like to have seen her when she was sixteen."

"Do you mean that she's pretty?"

"She has been, sir. I like 'em plumper myself."

"Describe her, I say."

"Well, she's quite small, and as thin as a broomstick, with reddish hair that curls. It's more than common pretty — her hair is. Her eyes can almost talk, and her smile is too sweet to trust, but she's thin and hungry-looking."

"Do you think that?" The question came anxiously.

"You should have seen her light into the eatables, sir."

"Tell Mrs. Badger to have a more substantial tray to-morrow. You need n't tell her why. I don't wish it. Tell her — tell her I am getting my appetite back."

Mr. Hansen regarded his charge with a broader approving smile than he would have used had the eye bandages been off.

"I'll do so, sir," he said respectfully.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN THE LIMOUSINE

THAT evening, every time the telephone rang at Rose Ledge, Vivian flew to answer it herself. At last she was rewarded.

"Is that you, Miss Vivian?"

"Oh, Mrs. Chetwyn, yes," came the eager answer. "You're laughing. What a good omen!"

"Yes, I've been chuckling ever since Hansen, your brother's nurse, hung up. I told him not to fail to call me as soon as he could after Mrs. Laird left; told him to go where Ferdy could n't hear him and tell me just how they had got on; and I assure you my little dryad made good. I don't know whether I told you she is a grandmother. Hansen seemed to think it his duty to tell me, in a heavy, measured tone, how she ran up and down the ladder in the library and in all ways comported herself as unlike a grandmother as could be conceived. If only I could have been a fly on the wall!"

"But how funny! What a queer woman!" returned Vivian.

"Oh, when you see her you'll understand it. She is very impulsive and childlike, but at any rate she pleased Ferdy. Hansen said he was quite short with him for coming in and disturbing the reading when the hour had passed. Then Ferdy and she had tea together, and Hansen said he ate with more relish than he had ever seen him, and Ferdy asked her to come again tomorrow. They're reading 'Treasure Island.'"

"Oh, Mrs. Chetwyn, Mrs. Chetwyn, you're always our mascot!"

"Well, I assure you I am as pleased as you are. The little woman is in a peculiar situation and needs this position as much as Ferdy needs her."

"I can't wait to tell father. You know how grateful I am to you, don't you?"

"Yes, dear, and so am I grateful. Good-night, we'll see what to-morrow brings forth and we know it will be all good.

"Yes. Good-bye."

Vivian turned from the telephone with sparkling eyes. She hastened out on the terrace where her father was smoking with one of his guests. "Mr. Hoyne, will you excuse daddy a minute?" She captured her parent and drew him aside. He held his cigar and looked at her curiously.

"What is it, Vivian? Have you found a million?"

"Better than that. It's about Ferdy."

Mr. Breed's expression became alert. "Ferdy? I've never found him as low-spirited as he was this morning. I've been confounding the doctor all day for letting us maroon him in there."

Vivian's hands were clasped around her father's arm. "You know I told you Mrs. Chetwyn was going to help us to find a reader. She sent one there to-day on trial, a Mrs. Ladd, and Ferdy likes her and has asked her to come again to-morrow. She's a grandmother, but according to Hansen a very frisky one, and they had a beautiful time and Ferdy had tea with her and seemed to enjoy it, and Hansen said he ate — oh, daddy," the girl suddenly bowed her head against her father's sleeve, "if you knew how I envy that woman! I'm green-eyed,

when I think of it. If Ferdy would only have tea with me and enjoy it! He treats me — formally, absolutely *formally*."

"You have one on me at that. He treats me as if I were a bore."

"Mrs. Chetwyn is just wonderful, daddy. Ferdy was so firm against having a young person come in, and think of her finding a grandmother who is lively and companionable. Hansen 'phoned Mrs. Chetwyn that this Mrs. Ladd ran up and down the ladder in the library and she and Ferdy had tea together and Ferdy ate and was — interested."

"Well," remarked Mr. Breed, "I should be inclined to borrow from Gilbert and consider that

'That 's the sort of grandma  
Who is usually spurious.'"

"No, no," returned Vivian earnestly; "you know our dear Mrs. Chetwyn could n't be imposed upon. Mrs. Ladd is some one she knew, and that morning when I went to find Mrs. Chetwyn and ask her help, Mrs. Ladd was close to us, hidden by bushes, and heard me say we wanted a reader, and after I left she just swooped on Mrs. Chetwyn and asked for the position. Is n't it wonderful that a strange woman should fall out of the sky, almost, just when we needed her?"

"Don't angels always do that?" returned Mr. Breed, beginning to smoke again. "I suppose grandmas are no exception. Doubtless her wings are what help her up the library ladder."

"You would n't make any fun of her to Ferdy?" asked Vivian anxiously.

"Fun!" As her father repeated the word a contraction passed over the muscles of his face. He removed his

cigar and looked at it. His lips set as if in effort to bear pain.

Vivian saw beneath his imperturbability in the passing spasm. She suddenly realized how gray his dark hair had become in these last months. She pressed his arm again and laid her cheek against it. "If this goes on," she said, "perhaps before long Ferdy will let me come to see him again. Go back to Mr. Hoyne, dear. We're all going out in the launch. Will you and he come?"

The next morning Adam Breed dropped in as usual for the daily call on his son. The latter had just had his bath and was still in bed. The father's heart never learned a stoical endurance of the sight of the helpless figure with its set lips. There was always that painful contraction of intense compassion mingled with impotent resentment.

"Good-morning, son. Good-morning, Hansen."

"Good-morning, dad," came the usual lifeless response.

"Every day I'm in hopes that you'll get a back-to-the-farm spirit," said Mr. Breed, taking a chair beside the bed. "We miss you at Rose Ledge. Want to go back?"

"No, dad. I like it here."

The father noted the word. He could not remember when the boy had last spoken of liking anything.

"All right, son. Got everything you want?"

"Yes, everything and nothing," answered the boy wearily.

"You get out every morning?"

"Yes."

"Enjoy your drive a little, do you?"

"As much as any rag doll would," was the languid reply.

The contraction again passed over Adam Breed's forehead.

Hansen moving about the room, going on with his work, spoke.

"Your son slept better last night than he has been doing, sir."

"That's good news. Every little helps, eh, son?"

There was no reply to this and the father proceeded: "I wanted to hear whether you liked the reader Mrs. Chetwyn found for you, or whether you want us to look for some one else. I can attend to it to-day."

"No!" came with such emphasis from the bed that it sent Hansen into a perfect storm of winks, directed at the visitor, with emphatic nods, smiles, and gestures pointing toward the floor, intended, Mr. Breed understood, as reference to his den below.

"No what?" he said. "Do you mean you don't like her, or that you don't care to have me find some one else?"

"She's all right," said Ferdy.

"Good," returned his father. "Then is she coming again to-day?"

"Sure thing," said Ferdy. And Hansen lifted his shoulders and smiled broadly, nodding again. Mr. Breed nodded back.

"Well, I'm glad she suits you. If you get tired of her style, let me know. There's just as good fish in the sea, you know, as any that ever came out of it."

"She's all right," repeated Ferdy.

"The first thing that has been all right in three months," reflected Mr. Breed, as he went downstairs and sought Mrs. Badger.

"I hear that our young man had a lady come to read to him yesterday," he said.

"Yes, sir, a person came," returned the sheeted and shaded one, pursing her lips.

"A pleasant person, I suppose. Mr. Ferdinand liked her. What was she like? Large or small? Young or old?"

"Small, sir. Quite a plain person. I did n't notice her age much."

"You served tea to them?"

"Yes, sir. Hansen said as how Mr. Ferdinand took an interest and wants it more substantial to-day."

Mr. Breed nodded and smiled, remembering the nurse's pantomime. "Good work, Mrs. Badger. If you can cheat our boy into eating, that's what we want. I'm very much pleased to hear this."

Mrs. Badger sniffed. "I do the best I can, sir," she returned with a modest and martyred air.

"Go on, you old crape-hanger," muttered Mr. Breed as he entered his car. "Who cares for your dumps so long as you're a *cordon bleu*!"

That day at lunch the twins informed their grandmother with great glee that the following day was their birthday and that they were to have a party and Nora was going to bake a cake with candles on it.

May Ca'line in her street dress again aroused her daughter-in-law's curiosity. Her face bore a new expression. She somehow looked as if she had intention and was happy.

"I guess you had a good time yesterday with your pick-up," said Gladys. "Are you going out with her again?"

"No, just by myself to-day."

Gladys was so constantly making her own plans secretly that she wondered if Joe's mother had any thoughts or movements that she was not sharing with the family. May Ca'line still stood to her as a threat. Possibly she might go to Joe's office or meet him in town. Gladys argued that any secret May Ca'line might keep from her would be inimical to her peace.

To-day the mother had a little blue ribbon under the rolling collar of her blouse. Her general effect was that she was going somewhere. She went somewhere yesterday. Why, if it was an innocent errand, should n't she naturally tell where she was going?

"If you're just out for a walk, then," said Gladys carelessly, "would you mind taking the children? I have some sewing I ought to do this afternoon."

Her sharp eyes saw May Ca'line's color rise.

"Why, I'm sorry, Gladys, this Mrs. Chetwyn I was with yesterday made an engagement for me this afternoon to go to see a sick friend, and I could n't take the children. I'm sorry."

Gladys was silent. If this was the truth it had nothing to do with Joe and was therefore harmless. The twins began talking noisily of what they would do tomorrow at their party, and the moment passed.

It was the following day at noon that another and more vital moment arrived. Gladys had expected her mother-in-law to come to the lunch-table in the blue-sprigged muslin in honor of the party, but she appeared again in street dress. The children babbled away as usual.

"Don't talk so much," said Gladys. "Listen to your grandmother. She is going to show you and the other children some games this afternoon."

May Ca'line looked up. "No, I did n't plan to stay at home, Gladys."

The younger woman flushed. Her mother-in-law could be very useful she had found. "The idea of your going out when the children are going to have a birthday party!" she said.

"I would have been glad to stay. You said the other night you did n't care to have me."

"We want you!" shouted the twins. "You can play games and you can tell stories."

"I'm so sorry I can't stay," said May Ca'line, casting a troubled look on the twins who continued to roar their disapproval.

"You need n't be so touchy," said Gladys. "Of course we should like to have you stay. Shut up, children."

"I'm truly sorry I can't."

"Absurd. Of course you could stay if you wanted to. Telephone that — Mrs. — your pick-up."

"My engagement is n't with her. Wait, children, wait. I have some presents for you. I'll give them to you after lunch. I have a beetle that runs all around, and a doll; and to-night after you're in bed I'll tell you a story."

She quieted their wrath, but not that of Gladys. What secret was she keeping from them while she lived at their expense? Why was she ironing a white silk blouse in the morning and coming to the lunch-table every day with freshly arranged hair and dressed in her best? Gladys determined to know. If she could only discover something that would make Joe resentful of concealment!

She made an errand to the grocery and left the house

at the same time with her mother-in-law; saying a careless good-bye and starting in the opposite direction. After half a dozen steps she faced about and followed May Ca'line's light figure. She turned a corner and Gladys hastened forward. She paused there, stood still, and gazed, for her mother-in-law had evidently reached her goal. A handsome limousine car was parked by the walk. The liveried chauffeur jumped out, held open the door, and to Gladys's utter amazement May Ca'line stepped into it and was driven away — luckily for Gladys in the opposite direction, for she was glued to the spot, and staring with her mouth open.

It is not likely that May Ca'line would have seen her in any case, for the car was not vacant to-day. There sat a very lovely girl ready to welcome her.

"I am Miss Breed, Mrs. Ladd. I have wanted to meet you ever since Mrs. Chetwyn told me of your success with my poor brother."

The door of the car closed and they whirled away. May Ca'line's cheeks flushed with excitement and her sweet eyes, looking out from under the countrified hat, searched those of Adam's daughter and Joe's acquaintance and found a very frank and earnest friendliness.

"It is such a happy thing for me," she replied.

"Anything that makes Ferdy more cheerful, even for an hour, is such a blessing to father and me."

"Yes; the car took me to Mrs. Chetwyn's when I came back yesterday and she talked so beautifully about that, explaining how if a thing really blessed one person it blessed everybody. Is n't Mrs. Chetwyn wonderful?"

"Indeed she is. I call her our mascot."

"If she could see your brother she would do so much more for his happiness than I can. He likes her, to begin with, and I should think you could scarcely wait to have him under her influence."

"My father is afraid of her."

"What can you mean by that?"

"Why, if you have talked intimately with her, you must know that the first thing she would do with Ferdy would be to send his doctor away."

"But I heard you say — that blessed day in the park" — May Ca'line gave Vivian one of those smiles that made her face vivid — "that your doctor was absolutely nonplussed, anyway."

Vivian shook her head. "Yes, I know, but this is daddy's only son. Daddy wants the best and most expert and scientific thought on his case every minute. A woman's spiritual convictions he would put aside no matter how much he admired the woman, and we all love Mrs. Chetwyn. The doctor is always telling us to humor Ferdy —"

"There!" said May Ca'line quickly; "you see just from that what strength the doctor gives to the power of your brother's thought."

"Oh, certainly. All doctors know that the patient must be kept cheerful if possible. You seem to be the entering wedge to better things. I have been frightfully afraid of Ferdy's despondence, and Hansen 'phoned me last night that my brother was quite bright with you yesterday."

May Ca'line smiled deprecatingly and her pensive eyes twinkled up at her companion. "I'm a silly sort of person, Miss Breed. I see the funny side of things and I can't seem to help making people laugh."

"Make Ferdy laugh, Mrs. Ladd," said Vivian fervently, "and I'll get the President to decorate you. Will it be all right if I send you a check every week?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss Breed. If I can really help your brother you may be sure that I shall be so joyful and so grateful that it would be painting the lily to decorate me."

The car stopped before the house.

"Are n't you coming in?" asked May Ca'line, for when she had descended Vivian sat still.

"No." That troublesome swelling again filled the girl's throat. She could n't tell this happy, enviable little creature that Ferdy had requested her absence. "I have guests at home and must go back."

"Your brother is very indulgent to me," said May Ca'line. "We have tea after the reading. I wish you were going to have it with us to-day."

"I'd like to — Mrs. Ladd" — the girl beckoned May Ca'line nearer. "Don't you think we shall be friends?" she said earnestly. "Do you — do you like me?"

"It would n't be polite to tell you how much, Miss Breed."

"Then speak to Ferdy about me, will you? It's natural for him to feel a little bitter about the difference in our lives. He was always the most generous boy in the world, but his state is so unnatural now. He exaggerates and broods and — oh, I want to see him so much. Good-bye," Vivian finished abruptly and turned her head away.

May Ca'line went up the broad, shallow steps to the entrance hall. Her quick sympathies had grasped the situation.

“If a blessing blesses everybody, then a curse curses everybody,” she thought; “only the blessing is real and the curse is a sham,” she added, recalling Mrs. Chetwyn’s voice. “Here goes for another try to melt away the curse.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### TEARS AND LAUGHTER

**F**ERDY was evidently waiting, with face turned toward the door, and he greeted his reader with a faint smile.

"I've just had such a pleasure," said May Ca'line, giving her hat to the waiting Hansen. "Your beautiful sister came to call for me and we drove over together."

Ferdy's head turned back and his smile faded.

"She wanted to see what sort of a creature was coming to visit you every day, and when she found a little person from the country it did n't scare her at all. She was just as lovely to me as if I had been dressed fit for that shiny, cushiony car of yours."

"Are n't you?"

"No, indeed. That's one good thing about that horrid bandage," said May Ca'line, taking the chair Hansen had ready for her. "You can't see my old, made-over dress. By the time you're looking about again, perhaps I shall have something else. I love pretty clothes and I've seen so many since I came to town. I feel like one of those dingy little sparrows that take dust-baths in the road and I felt so more than ever to-day with your sister. She looked like a tea-rose dressed in a silvery cobweb. She is so sweet and kind and adores you so."

Hansen cast a benevolent smile upon the visitor and, as if previously instructed, left the room, closing the door behind him.

"Do you suppose you could get her to come and have tea with us some afternoon?" added May Ca'line.

"Oh, let her alone with her society friends. She's busier than a puppy chasing autumn leaves," responded Ferdy impatiently.

"She wants to be with you, Mr. Breed."

"Cut that 'Mister,' will you, Mrs. Laird? I've got the darnedest name that was ever wished on anybody. 'Ferdy' sounds as if I ought to have a bib and high chair, and 'Ferdinand' would fit the king of the Cannibal Islands."

"Well, have n't you another name?"

"Certainly I have. 'Adam Ferdinand' is the whole curse. You might choose between 'Addie' and 'Dam.'"

"'What's in a name?'" replied May Ca'line, laughing. "Don't you be cross to me. I've just escaped the wrath of two small furies at home. What do you think of my coming off and leaving two innocent little grandchildren who are having a birthday party this afternoon?"

"I think there would have been one large fury if you had n't."

"It's very nice of you to want me, but you don't know what may happen to me to-morrow. The last time I incurred their displeasure they chased me up a tree."

"When was that?"

"Oh, just lately. We had a slight difference of opinion and I turned it into a game."

The sick boy turned his bandaged eyes toward his companion and the corners of his mouth twitched. "You? Up a tree? Well, I still think, then, that you're putting one over on me."

"Not at all. Can't you see the picture? Two five-

year-old infants pursuing their venerable grandmother with fire in their eyes and their hands full of mud. She, her locks streaming, racing around the back yard, and at last with desperate strength pulling herself up into the family tree."

"You expect me to believe that?" Ferdy smiled.

"It's gospel truth. I forgot all Mrs. Chetwyn's rules of life, except one and that was to be an aviator. Those lowlands were likely to be terribly sorrowful for me, and then what do you think those imps did? Tried to dislodge their reverend ancestor with the hose."

It was then that May Ca'line won her decoration, for Ferdy laughed with boyish spontaneity.

"Well, your sympathy is all that keeps me up," she said, and he laughed harder.

Hansen opened the door and peeped in anxiously. "Do — you want me?" he asked.

"Not a bit, Hansen," said May Ca'line cheerfully.

The nurse threw up both his hands and lifting his gaze heavenward vanished, leaving the door open.

"I'll tell you!" said May Ca'line; "why don't I call you Andy?"

"Another y," said the boy. "You might as well yield to the inevitable. I suppose I'll be Ferdy till I'm white-haired, if I ever am." The weary closing tone was his usual one.

"Of course you will be. You need n't hope to escape."

"Well, you need n't think I'll endure fifty years laid out like this," declared the boy with a sort of fierce deliberation.

"I should say not," rejoined his companion in a matter-of-fact tone. "Of course the doctor has told you that your trouble is nervous and not organic."

"What do I care for that? As you said a minute ago, 'What's in a name?'"

"Not much, I know, but there's a lot in a condition and I feel very hopeful about you."

"Indeed," said the boy with a scornful inflection. "It's very good of you. Please remember what I said about the cheering-up business."

"Oh, nonsense. Don't talk that way to a grandmother. Let's face the thing and make up our minds to down it."

"You're a good sport," said Ferdy quietly. "Perhaps if I'd been as good a one I should n't be here."

"Tell me about it. Would you mind?"

The boy spoke without hesitation. If May Ca'line had known it, that was the most flattering thing that had ever happened to her; for the subject had been taboo.

"When I entered college I was crazy about athletics. I did a lot of physical work, and knowing that permission for activity in those lines depended partly on scholarship, I overstudied, I suppose. I overdid everything as it seems, and last April I collapsed like a contemptible sissy."

As the boy talked his pale countenance gave more and more evidence of overpowering excitement and his last words were nearly overwhelmed by a convulsive sob that strained his whole body. Two tears stole down from under the bandage.

May Ca'line could n't bear it. She started up and leaning over him, gently pressed his head against her bosom and bowed hers above it. He did not resist the embrace, but rested his cheek against her while he fought for self-control.

A movement made her look up. A tall man stood in the open doorway. His first view of her bowed head had shown him only that knot of curls, never forgotten, so when she looked up, the pensive eyes, misty now, were recognized, at once.

Involuntarily she raised her hand in a gesture of dismissal, and obediently the man stepped back quietly and vanished. It came over her slowly who he might have been, and the arms around the boy quivered. Absorbed in his nervous spasm of weeping, he had heard nothing.

At last he was quiet and she withdrew from him and resumed her chair. Even if that stranger proved to be Adam Breed she had a higher responsibility now than to think of his opinion. From all she had heard she felt that Ferdy's confiding in her was a phenomenon. She determined to be worthy of it.

"Thank you for telling me," she said simply. "Now, the next thing is to meet the trouble. I heard your sister quote the doctor as saying that nervousness is a woman — capricious. Caprice sometimes jumps the right way, and even if you laugh at me for having an opinion I am sure that you are not going to remain in this condition. You're a big fellow. You probably grew beyond your strength to begin with. Now, what should you think of our spending part of the time in reading things that would be a help to you in college?"

"As if I should ever go back!" said Ferdy; and words and voice betrayed the depths of his young despair.

"Most certainly you're going back! And even if you don't believe it now, what's the harm of acting as if you were and reading what would be of some use when you do, if you do?"

"No harm," replied Ferdy, and May Ca'line could see that the idea was not disagreeable.

"Let me begin on it," she said; "then when you are stronger a tutor will come in; and you are so young —"

"Young! I'm nineteen and have n't advanced beyond being a cry-baby."

Adam Breed had vanished from sight, but not from sound. He overheard this interview and only stole away when his son's reader began to relate the continuance of their absorbing story.

His daughter had driven to his office when she left May Ca'line, and closeted with her father in his sanctum had talked so hopefully of the situation that she roused his interest and curiosity.

"And if I could only think," said the girl in finishing, "who this Mrs. Ladd is like, it would relieve me. Coming over in the motor it seems to me I have considered every woman of my acquaintance, and I can't locate the resemblance. I want you to see her. She is such a dear little thing."

"You and Ferdy appear to be agreed. I must go over there and see if it's a taste that runs all through the family," was the reply.

As Vivian went out she paused in the anteroom to speak to her father's secretary. He thought he had never seen her look so attractive. The new hopefulness had brightened her eyes and flushed her cheeks. Joe Laird rose as she spoke to him and he smiled frank admiration at the challenge of her radiant regard.

"I've just been telling father of our good fortune in finding a reader for my brother who suits him. It has been so hard to raise his spirits and he really likes this

little woman. Fancy Ferdy enjoying a social tea with anybody! It seems like a good world to-day."

"Sincere congratulations," said Joe. Then he added: "You did n't encourage me to visit him, but I've only been waiting for the permission. You know I'm more than ready."

Vivian nodded. "This may be the beginning of better things. Who knows but you and daddy and I will be going over some afternoon to have tea with them!"

She smiled joyously and he returned her glad look more self-forgetfully than he had ever done. It went without saying that she was his ideal. She must be the ideal of every man who saw her, and the truth shone now in his face. When she left him, her color had deepened from the tea-rose tint to that of the flower named in honor of girls of her sort.

She had gone down in the elevator and reached her motor before some cog in her memory slipped into place. "Why, it is he!" she thought with amusement. "It is he that she reminds me of. How funny! I must tell him some day."

Adam Breed found it difficult to fix his mind on business after his daughter's talk. Could hope for Ferdy possibly come through this stranger? If so she was a most important person to him. He must see and talk with her, and get her ideas, if she had any, on this heavy problem. He ordered his car and closed his desk.

Had May Ca'line been facing him just now as he stood in that open doorway, he might not have recognized her more quickly than she did him; but those

curls, that had twined themselves so closely around his youthful heartstrings that he had never been entirely free, had changed but very little, and the sweet expression of May Ca'line's face when just now she had raised it from his son's head, had made her radiant with a loftier beauty than that which he had wooed.

When he withdrew he plied Hansen with questions eliciting the news that Ferdy had been laughing a few minutes before.

"Weeping," thought Adam Breed. "Hysteria. Bad!"

"Her name, Hansen, I believe is Laird?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm." Mr. Breed began walking up and down the room. Of course it was very easy for Vivian to have misunderstood the name over the telephone.

"And your son looks for her, sir, every minute from the time he comes in from his drive until she gets here. I dare say he asks me to look at the clock a hundred times between twelve and two."

"Well, well, well," returned Adam Breed, continuing his restless march, "we seem to have found the right person."

"I should say so, sir. It startled me a few minutes ago when I heard him laugh. He forbids me to interrupt them, but I feared she might be having some trouble with him. I never heard him laugh, you know, sir."

"I wonder—perhaps excitement is n't good for him."

"*She* is, sir. Don't you be afraid, Mr. Breed. My patient has slept well for the first time, since she came."

"Sleep means a lot—eh, Hansen?"

"Just about everything in his case, sir. She gets him to eat too. Their tray will go in in a few minutes. Will you, perhaps, have tea with them, sir?"

"Not to-day. You're telling me fine news, Hansen."

"Yes, sir, and I must tell you another hopeful sign. Mrs. Laird is one of those thin, hungry-looking sort of folks. She has that look that comes when for a long time one has n't been sufficiently nourished, and I happened to say as much to your son and he took fire at once. The thing that entertains him most mornings is to think up dishes to put on the tray to tempt her. She don't need any tempting either, believe me. If she comes here long she is going to have a very different look, sir, a very different look."

Adam Breed's face flushed as the tale went on. Hansen's theory afflicted him. His secretary's evident misery when he returned from Leacock he had not forgotten. Could it have had anything to do with a discovery of his mother's privations?

"What you tell me is very interesting," he returned now, clearing his throat. "We cannot do too much for Mrs. Laird if she is able to accomplish anything for the boy — anything even in the line of his entertainment."

"I understand, sir, and let me tell you I'd hate to go back to things as they were a week ago. You know the poet talks of a mind diseased. Nothing a doctor could prescribe could cure that despondency. Those long silences, sir, — I did n't like them."

Mr. Breed nodded gravely. He wondered if Hansen had heard any of the repressed sobbing upon which he himself had intruded. How firmly he had been dismissed by that little hand. He felt that he should never forget that lifted Madonna face, and the protecting arms enfolding his idolized boy.

"Does my son ever break down — ever weep?" he asked.

"Oh, never, sir. He's more on the Stoic order, sir."

"It was another good sign, perhaps, then," mused Adam Breed. "What hour does Mrs. Laird leave?"

"She's supposed to leave at four o'clock, but she does n't get off much before five. I have the car ordered around at four-thirty."

Mr. Breed nodded. "I won't disturb them to-day."

He left the house and his eyes had something of that new life which had glowed in Vivian's. The pain which had gripped his heart at the grievous sounds from his helpless son still gnawed, but he reflected that it was perhaps the breaking-up of the ice and a harbinger of spring.

May Ca'line had found that she could lure Ferdy into eating in the ratio of her own zest. She little knew that the dainty banquet was for her own good and that Ferdy was doing the luring.

She had read them both into a brighter mood when the tray came in.

The appearing of that tall man in the doorway had haunted her sub-conscious thought ever since he vanished. She despised herself for being glad that the room was shaded. If that was Adam he had obtained only a glimpse of her faded self, and the lightning never strikes twice in the same place. He would not disturb them again, finding that that was the reading hour. His daughter would tell him that, weeping or not, his son was safe with her. She had noticed that Vivian misunderstood her name and had rejoiced in it.

Ferdy had not seemed to regret his own display of emotion and had promised to consider what they should undertake in the way of heavier reading; so she left the house well satisfied.

This time, however, even more than before she glanced up and down the street in apprehension. She was startled by the appearance of a man now leaving the waiting car. He stood with his hat off, holding the door open, regarding her.

"How do you do, May?" he said, as she approached, and he held out his hand.

She had been in the habit of hastily recalling the rules of life at each stressful moment since Mrs. Chetwyn gave them to her. Now swiftly she ran through them mentally.

"Is it really you?" she said.

He motioned her to enter the car, and to her consternation followed her, and shut the door. The motor moved smoothly away.

"You're very unflattering," he said. "I knew you at once."

"You had heard I was there."

"No, I was surprised."

May Ca'line cast fleeting, scared glances at the perfectly groomed figure, the short dark hair, with its white threads, and the gray mustache. Her heart beat very fast.

"I need to give you an explanation, Mr. Breed."

"I don't think so; but you do need to stop calling me 'Mr. Breed.'"

May Ca'line felt a wee bit less uncomfortable. Surely the great man was very gracious.

"The men of your family seem to object to 'Mister,'" she returned. "Ferdie stopped my using it to-day. I do, though, feel like giving you an explanation of why you find me installed in your house without consulting an old friend like yourself. I asked for the position and

obtained it before I knew it was in your house, and I was trying to conceal it from Joe, not from you, thinking it might hurt him to have his mother earning money — you understand? So when I found that it was your son who needed me I concealed it from you, too, because Joe was in your employ. Do you pardon what seems rather silly?"

"If I ever had anything to pardon you, it was done to-day when I saw my boy's head against your breast. What do you think of his case, May?" Adam Breed's grave eyes met her regard and held it.

"I think he is going to get well."

"Why?"

"Because it's ridiculous for him not to. He has mortified and lashed and hated himself into nervous prostration that has taken this form. You know that wonderful Mrs. Chetwyn?"

"Yes."

"She gave me three rules of life and I persuaded Ferdy to say them before I left to-day — Rejoice always, Fear not, and Love one another."

"Ferdy said that, eh?"

"Yes, he did; a little scornfully, I admit, but he said it."

"You're a magician."

"Oh, no, just a mother; and boys are my specialty."

Adam Breed kept his eyes on the vivacious face. "Joe is a good sample," he said.

May Ca'line smiled up at him gratefully. "Thank you," she returned.

"I should like to give you something to thank me for," he declared, "for you are doing for me the most important thing in life."

"And such a happy thing for me," she said spontaneously. "I don't — there really did n't seem much occupation for me in Joe's little home —" She paused, fearing to say too much.

"I understand, May, as well as if you talked for half an hour. A dove is n't at home in a magpie's nest."

She cast pleading eyes up at him. "But it's Joe's nest," she said.

"Yes, poor lad," he answered. "It's all right, May. You are doing a great work. I'm skeptical, though. It seems wicked to throw any cold water, but it is too good to last. Don't be disappointed if Ferdy wearies of it all and decides against your coming any more."

May Ca'line flashed a merry smile at him. "Don't worry about that," she answered impulsively; "I can still charm nineteen."

Then how she flushed, and that night before her mirror what names were hurled at her disgusted eyes.

But Adam Breed accepted the statement with grave gratitude. "May nothing break that spell," he said devoutly. "You wish nothing said to Joe, then, about your errand of mercy?"

"Since it can be called that," said May Ca'line, "of course he cannot object, and I shall tell him. His family cannot do too much for yours, Adam. I glow with gratitude whenever I remember how you lifted him from the slough of despond."

Her companion smiled down at the little woman in the very white blouse and the very obviously home-made hat and skirt.

"That *was* fortunate," he replied; "Joe chose his inheritance well."

"Yes, he had a good father," declared May Ca'line,

but her demure mendacity could not be described as unblushing.

"Why are we stopping at this drug-store?" inquired Adam Breed as the car came to a standstill.

"This is where I get out. This is where Cinderella takes her grand coach and leaves it."

The twinkle in her eye was as bright as of old, her companion thought.

"Oho! The whole thing is a clandestine performance, eh?"

They stood on the walk a minute. "You know I told you I was keeping this adventure a secret from Joe. My daughter-in-law —"

"Enough," interrupted Breed; "let us not spoil our interview."

"You see, the twins —"

"No, I don't, thank Heaven!"

May Ca'line laughed. "You're very rude. The poor little things."

"Quite so. The drug-store be it, then. Good-bye, May." He held out his hand and she put hers in it.

"Bless you," he said, pressing the hard little hand for an instant.

The concentration of his expression on the drive back to where the Rose Ledge motor waited was very grave. His thoughts were absorbed in his boy.

"That never occurred to me," he muttered at last, "but perhaps it would be a good move for him. Perhaps I have builded better than I knew."

Later, as his car approached the gates of Rose Ledge, he saw Vivian waiting by one of the vine-laden stone posts. She often came to meet him and now he left the car and they walked up the rose lane arm in arm.

"I went over to the house," he said, without preamble, "and found a most astonishing sight: Ferdy weeping in the arms of his reader."

"Daddy!"

"She motioned me away and I went."

"Oh, daddy, what did it mean?" Vivian's eyes filled.

"Only good, I fancy. At any rate, she is hopeful about him."

"How do you know? Did you talk with her?"

"I drove home with her in the motor."

"I'm so glad you did. Is n't she attractive? So pretty and so neat and such poor little clothes, and, do you know, I've thought at last who she looks like — that elusive resemblance? I wonder if you noticed it."

"You mean Laird?"

"Why, you did notice it!" returned Vivian, surprised. "How could you locate it so quickly?"

"Because it's rather natural. She's his mother."

"Daddy Breed!"

"Yes, you put me off with your 'Ladd.'"

"I thought it was 'Ladd.'" Vivian's color had risen. "I said — I always said he had a lovely mother," she added, looking into space.

"He has," returned Adam Breed. "I knew her long ago. She was the prettiest girl in Leacock where I began work. She was already bespoken when I met her or she might have been your mother too."

"Why, daddy, you're taking my breath away! Why do you keep such secrets from me?"

"Oh, there is no time for back numbers in this world. She evidently thought so too, for it has been plain to see that Joe has had no idea that I knew his mother.

He is to learn this evening what she is doing for us. He has n't even known that."

"I think it's a shame for your generation to be so secretive," declared Vivian.

"You and Mrs. Chetwyn could n't have named any names when you had your confab in the park, for Mrs. Laird took the position without knowing it was the family of Joe's employer, and felt rather embarrassed and glad to explain it to me. She evidently wanted to earn money."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Chetwyn said she needed the situation."

"Probably she needed to get away from the house more than to earn the money," returned Adam Breed.

"Oh, oh, she has to live with that — that wrong wife!" exclaimed Vivian. "I had forgotten that. What more can we do for her? I'd love to dress her for one thing."

Her father smiled down at the girl's expressive face. "Ferdy laughed as well as cried to-day," he said.

She nodded. "Good! I begged her to make him laugh. Whatever he does, so long as it is with her, is all right. We're in a proscenium box, daddy, and must n't do anything but look on. You spoke of Leacock. I had a letter from there to-day. Willis Frothingham wrote me that he is doing over an old house, to an amusing Rube accompaniment. He says he is homesick for Rose Ledge and he keeps the air dark with workmen in the effort to hasten matters and get away."

"He'll be thorough, though," returned Adam Breed thoughtfully. "Frothingham is a good fellow and going straight up the ladder. Shall you welcome him back to Rose Ledge?"

"Oh, yes, I like him."

"His feeling for you is not so moderate. He has been good enough to confide his hopes to me."

"What did you say to him?" asked Vivian, quite calmly.

"I did n't discourage him. I don't believe I have any one better to hope for than Frothingham. He's a clean, fine chap."

"Yes, he is," returned the girl abstractedly. "Daddy, don't you think Mr. Laird will be glad that it is his mother who is helping us? I met him in the park with his family one day. I love to think of any pleasure coming into his life; and I'm sure this will be one. He is so sympathetic about Ferdy."

Adam Breed looked down at his daughter. She had at various times shown considerable solicitude on the subject of his handsome secretary. It occurred to him now that perhaps she had an inherited taste.

"No doubt of it," he answered; "Joe's a good fellow. His heart is in the right place."

## CHAPTER XX

### A DRAMATIC MOMENT

WHEN May Ca'line tripped up the home steps a little later the dozen children who had been at the party had left. Bob and Ella were jumping about the porch, which bore traces of the festivities in the form of spilled ice-cream and cake crumbs, and they seized upon their grandmother with noisy demands for the promised story.

"After you are in bed, dears. Don't you remember what I said?"

"Indeed, they won't have any story," declared Gladys, suddenly appearing in the doorway, evidently very hot, cross, and tired. "They have been bad children all the afternoon!"

"She took away my beetle, grandma," said Bob, his little face growing very red.

"And my doll's dress is torn," mourned Ella.

"Keep still, both of you," said Gladys. "Come straight upstairs to bed. I've a mind to give you both a good spanking."

Wails instantly filled the air.

"Let me put them to bed, Gladys," begged May Ca'line. "You're tired, I'm sure."

"A lot you care if I am tired," retorted Gladys, turning on her; "going out when there was so much to do here."

"Yes, grandmother, you put us to bed," cried the children, seizing May Ca'line's skirts.

Well they knew there was reason to fear their mother when her eyes looked as they did now. She pulled them away from their clinging hold and drove them, loudly weeping, upstairs before her. May Ca'line followed close and tried to enter the nursery with them.

"You keep out of here!" said Gladys, facing her.

"We want you, grandmother, we want you!" cried the twins, struggling to pass their mother, tears racing down their cheeks.

The jealousy that had been smouldering all the afternoon rose to Gladys's head. May Ca'line, white and firm, held her ground.

"Promise me, then, that you won't whip the children," she said steadily.

"I shall whip my own children when I please and not ask you — *you*, going around the corner to meet your smart friends. I saw you! Ashamed of your son's home, or of yourself, nobody knows which. I shall tell Joe."

"Shall *I* tell Joe is the question?" returned May Ca'line slowly, her eyes as stern as the voice which made itself heard above the wailing which went on distressfully. "Your errand around the corner is very different from mine, Gladys. I pity you and I hesitate."

A bucket of cold water poured over her daughter-in-law would not have had a more distinct effect. Gladys's eyes dropped from the steady, accusing gaze which had no fear of her, but held such an arraignment as no guilty conscience could sustain.

"Oh, put them to bed if you want to!" she said suddenly, and pushing by her mother-in-law she disappeared and the latter found herself alone with the children who rushed to her and clung as to a rock of refuge.

Their cries ceased and they were silent but for an occasional spasmodic sob while she bathed and caressed them.

Gladys below stairs waited gloomily for her husband. Some instinct told her that May Ca'line's words had been intended as a warning to herself, but that she had not yet decided to make her son miserable. If Gladys could only by any means instill a distrust of his mother into Joe, it would give her the keenest satisfaction. She reflected on the contrast between Henry Bird's cheap little runabout and the luxurious motor in which May Ca'line had gone away and probably returned this afternoon, and again a cankering jealousy of her mother-in-law returned. A dozen times during their festivity to-day the children had quoted her and fretted at her absence.

"We did very well before she came — very well," reflected Gladys repeatedly. She went down the steps to meet Joe when he appeared, and he wrenched his thoughts away from the tea-rose in the silvery cobweb as he saw his wife. She had on the deep pink gown to-day and he felt a passing wonder as to whether, when he could afford to give her finer raiment, she would consent to be less flamboyant.

"I'm tired to death," she announced as she kissed him and hung her heavy weight on his arm.

"Children's party pretty strenuous?"

"I should say so. Do sit down a minute and cool off before you go in."

He dropped obediently into a piazza chair beside her.

"It is the one time since your mother came that she could have been a real help to me and she saw fit to go out. I must say I never was more surprised."

"Why should you have been surprised? You invited her to."

"Invited her to what?"

"You said you preferred to run your own children's parties."

"As if that was any harm! Does she have to be the whole thing? Could n't she have stayed and helped Nora with the hundred little matters that have to be seen to at such a time?"

"I'm sure she would have been glad to stay if you had asked her."

"Guess again," retorted Gladys; "I did ask her."

"Well, I am surprised, then. In her case I did n't think the worm could be induced to turn," said Joe wearily. "What did she answer? I'd like to hear what the little sport said."

"Little sport! You're always petting her!" exclaimed Gladys.

"Oh, I don't think so," returned Joe indifferently.

"She's more of a sport than you think, perhaps," said Gladys viciously. "Her reply this noon was that she had an engagement."

"Bully for her. I should think she'd have wanted one. We must get her a new dress, Gladys. She looks so sweet to me that I'm apt to forget that now she's in Rome she'll want to look a little more as the Romans look."

"You think of nothing but her!" exclaimed Gladys, her eyes wet with resentment. "You don't care a bit that I'm tired out and that she left everything for me to do."

"Why, it's your own house, is n't it, and your own children? You've impressed that on her often enough. Had an engagement! That is a joke."

"It is not. You think you know all about her; know all that she is doing. She had an engagement to-day, and she had one yesterday, and one the day before."

Joe emitted a grunt of amusement. "You must n't be angry with me if I say I admire her taste. Of course the engagement is with the swans, but you've driven her to it, you know. It might all have been very different if you had chosen."

"Her engagement was not with the swans," returned Gladys — the rose set in velvet night was a very red rose as she spoke, and the night of her eyes showed sparks — "unless the swans have the swellest limousine that has ever been seen in this neighborhood."

Joe turned toward her excited face.

"Your mother has evidently picked up some rich acquaintance. She spoke of this person once, but do you suppose that car calls here for her? No, indeed. Your mother has it meet her around the block. Her son's house, your house, is n't good enough for her. She starts off for a walk as innocent as you please and when she gets out of sight the man in livery jumps down and holds open the door of the motor and away she goes."

"Wonderful!" said Joe, and he meant it. He had never heard Martha Berry say that his mother was a kind of a witch, but he would have fully concurred.

"Now, you ask her," went on Gladys — "ask her at the dinner-table where she has been this afternoon. See if she'll tell you. It's an insult to us that she does n't have that car call here. She accepts our hospitality" — Joe interrupted her with a laugh — "and repays it like that!" Gladys finished angrily. "I just happened to see her get into that car by accident."

"It's awfully difficult to do anything *sub rosa* in this

neighborhood," said Joe, glancing around at his wife, and the guilty always fleeing when none pursue, Gladys fancied his look was strange. It was a cold look, cold and unsympathetic she considered, and antagonism rose up against him.

"If my mother can pick up an acquaintance with a fine car she is sensible to do it," said Joe, stifling a yawn and rising from his chair.

"But how do you like her being ashamed of you?"

"Gad! I should think she would be," was the ambiguous reply. "Down in five minutes, Gladys," he added, and disappeared into the house.

His wife stared into the cucumber vines for a minute. "I'm a fool to stand it," she muttered at last, and memory was busy. "We can only live once."

Joe was surprised at the quiet of the nursery, when after his ablutions he turned his steps thither. When he reached the door his mother's face smiled up at him from the pillow.

"I don't suppose they could be waked with a cannon," she said, "but I'm afraid to get up and climb over Bob; the poor babies were so tired."

"No need," replied Joe, and reaching across his heir, he lifted his mother from the bed and stood her on her feet. She laughed.

"Thank you, dear. That was rather strenuous for a hot night."

"A very small payment on my debt, you mite," he replied.

"What debt?"

"The hot nights you've toted me around."

"Oh, that was such fun, Joe," she said wistfully. "I've so often wished I could have you a baby again."

"I'll always be a baby to you, honey," he returned, kissing her. "You're still worth a dozen of me."

Seated at the dinner-table Gladys waited to see if her husband would take her advice and question his mother. He had put an indifferent face upon her disclosure, but surely his vanity must have been hurt.

"There is joy in the Breed family to-day," he said.

"What has happened to them now?" asked Gladys.

"'He that hath a goose shall get a goose.' I don't see what more they can want."

"You've forgotten," said Joe; "the son has been ill for months. They live under a cloud in spite of all their belongings. He has been threatened with melancholia — did n't even want to see his father and sister. Miss Breed told me to-day they have found a reader for him, some one to come in every day, and he has taken a fancy to this person, has tea with her, and takes notice generally. Miss Breed was jubilant talking about it."

"H'm," grunted Gladys; "why could n't they have got a pretty girl sooner? That was easy."

"The poor chap's eyes have to be bandaged. Beauty would n't figure. He is very difficult, it seems; won't have this and won't have that. They consider that they have found a prize."

May Ca'line, her eyes fixed on her iced bouillon, did not speak, but ate busily. It was so unlike her ready sympathy to make no glad comment that her son noticed her silence and downcast eyes.

"Getting the life squeezed out of her," he thought bitterly.

Gladys could wait no longer to witness her embarrassment.

"I've been telling Joe what a society woman his mother is getting to be," she said, endeavoring to speak with disarming innocence. "Engagements to-day, engagements yesterday, engagements to-morrow, and so quiet about it."

May Ca'line lifted her eyes to her son, who did not look at her, and Nora began to take away the bouillon cups.

"Yes, I have been quiet about it," she replied; "I thought it possible Joe might object to what I was doing."

"And you were going ahead with it anyway?" returned Gladys with a sneer.

Her husband sent her a lightning glance.

"It would n't be possible," he said, meeting his mother's pensive look, "for you to do anything to which I should object."

"Even to earn money, Joe?" May Ca'line's head dropped on one side in an apologetic gesture. She lifted her eyebrows and smiled.

"What?" Joe frowned questioningly. "To earn money?"

"You did n't think I could, did you? I shrank from being just a heavy weight on you and Gladys. I longed to do something, but could n't think of anything a commonplace woman like myself could turn her hand to. One day, quite suddenly, God sent me a position. It was in what the children call the Sunday Park. I call it that, too, for my happiest moments since coming to the city have been spent there with a lovely lady whom you must know."

Gladys with lowering brow was listening as intently as her husband. Her mother-in-law was going to make good again.

"But why could n't you have the car call for you at your son's house?" she asked.

May Ca'line's eyes seemed to look beyond her as she replied simply: "Because I could not keep my little experiment secret if I did. Until I knew that my services could give satisfaction I did n't want to disturb my boy. As soon as I proved that I was in my right place I intended to tell him, and had little doubt that he would allow me to be happy in my own way."

"And we've forced your hand, mother," said Joe, the line in his forehead deepening. "I'm sorry. I speak for Gladys in begging your pardon."

"No, not at all," returned May Ca'line quietly. "I am ready to tell you now because I've learned to-day that I am adequate for the work. I am the reader you have just spoken of."

"What!"

"The reader Miss Breed told you of to-day. She understood my name to be Ladd. I did n't correct her, for I knew you were acquainted, and I did n't want her to connect me with you until I was ready to speak."

"That was the Breed car, the Breed livery," thought Gladys, staring dumbly before her.

Shades of amusement, surprise, pride, flitted over Joe Laird's face. "But you ought to have told me, honey," he said. "My employer's house, you know."

"Yes, but I did n't know it was to be in his house and with his son until I had committed myself." May Ca'line spoke very steadily, but a spot of color burned in each cheek. "I never told you that long ago when we were young people I knew Mr. Breed well. He spent a season in Leacock working for that little branch railroad. It was while I was engaged to your father. So it

was a strange thing for me to do, to take a position in his home without communicating with him, an old friend, but you were in his employ, you see. If he knew of it, you would know of it."

Joe Laird pushed his chair back from the table in his eagerness. Adam Breed was his mother's old friend. He kept his seeking eyes on her delicate, flushed face as he tried to adjust his ideas and remember all that she had ever said or asked concerning his employer.

"Why did n't you tell me that?" he asked. "Why did n't you tell me when I first spoke of him?"

"It was too long ago to count for anything. Our boy-and-girl acquaintance had nothing to do with the present conditions."

Joe was viewing the mental picture of his cold, correct, powerful principal, and he slowly nodded as he kept his eyes fixed on his mother. His memory yielded several illuminating flashes.

"I think," he said, "that it has everything to do with present conditions. Gladys" — he suddenly turned to his wife who sat staring, her full lips sullenly parted — "do you remember my telling you that Mr. Breed picked me out of the bunch of clerks and made me his secretary because I looked like somebody? Here is the lady." He rose and stood beside his mother. He did not kiss her, but he took her hand and held it while he proceeded with a sort of solemnity. "Here is the reason we have been able to live in a decent house, eat decently, dress decently, and hold up our heads, instead of living desperately from hand to mouth."

May Ca'line controlled heroically a temptation to burst into tears with her head on her boy's precious hand.

"Don't say any more about it, please. I was glad," she managed to utter.

"You knew it, then!"

"It seemed that it must be so from what you told me. Your young face was like the youthful one he remembered. He —"

"He knew your age better than I did myself. He muttered something, and I was sure he said you were forty-seven; but he turned it off, of course, and I thought I had heard wrong. Well, well, mother," added Joe, gazing down at her admiringly, "you certainly made a deep impression."

"Oh, hush, dear. It is n't worth remembering. Please go and sit down. What we want to be grateful for now is that I can help that poor afflicted boy."

Joe resumed his seat at the table, still smiling. "Of course, if you stay with them it will have to come out that you are my mother, but I'll explain to the Governor."

"I did explain to-day," said May Ca'line.

"You've seen him, then?"

"Yes, he drove home with me. That lovely Miss Vivian came over for me, and he brought me home. The situation was a little complicated, but he will tell his daughter, and it will now be all understood."

"A regular family affair," said Joe, with a laugh. "Gladys, you know I was saying out on the piazza that we must get mother a new dress. She must have a hat, too. Don't you think so?"

Nora, who had sensed through the swing door that some tense moment was passing and had waited accordingly, now heard her master laugh and came in with the meat course.

Gladys was eating a dinner of bitter herbs. The pulses throbbed painfully in her temples. Everything she would have given a year of her life to gain had fallen into the lap of her mother-in-law. The interloper was enthroned higher than ever in Joe's heart and pride, and she was called upon to be grateful for the very bread she was eating. Her husband turned to his wife brightly. "Is n't it just like a story?" he asked.

"Yes; if I was n't so dead tired I could appreciate it better, I guess. I've got a splitting headache. If you don't mind I think I'll leave you and go to bed."

"Shan't Nora bring up something?" asked Joe as he rose with her.

"No, I don't want anything that Nora can give me," was her answer.

She left the room and went upstairs to the extension telephone in her room. There, before she laid her aching head on the pillow, she called up Henry Bird.

It was a bitter disappointment when word came back to her that he had left the city for a couple of days.

## CHAPTER XXI

### EVOLUTION

MAY CA'LINE awoke with a happy heart the next morning. She doubly enjoyed her *tête-à-tête* breakfast with Joe now that he knew and approved her occupation. As for him, he looked at her with new eyes. It was evident enough to him that if Adam Breed's youthful friendship for his mother had been friendship only, he would have told his secretary of it when he engaged him; and it was as evident that when he had related to his mother the experience that evening in Leacock she would have given him the key to it had her memories been not too conscious. Adam Breed's humble beginning on that little branch railroad had occurred during her engagement to his father. Joe's imagination played with the potentialities of the situation. One possibility as it occurred to him was repellent, foolish as that seemed under the circumstances. He did not wish Vivian Breed to be his sister.

May Ca'line called on Mrs. Chetwyn the same morning and told her all that had occurred, save only those portions of the tale which bore on her old romance. That lady listened with interest.

"Then," she said, "when you felt dashed by the discovery that your errand lay in Mr. Breed's house, why did n't you communicate with him?"

May Ca'line folded her cotton gloves together and looked very demure. "He had n't told Joe that he knew me. I did n't wish to be the first to call up our

old acquaintance," she answered, and Mrs. Chetwyn nodded.

"I see," she responded kindly, unconscious that it was through a glass, darkly. "So now you are a happy little lady," she added.

May Ca'line regarded her with grave eyes. "I shall be when Gladys is happy and good, and Ferdy is well."

"Rejoice always," returned Mrs. Chetwyn. "Your thought can be very important to them."

They talked for an hour and Mrs. Chetwyn lent her visitor books to read and study, books bearing on her philosophy of life.

"Adam — Mr. Breed, must hear you talk of this," said May Ca'line impulsively. "You must come to Ferdy."

"Wait," returned Mrs. Chetwyn. "You can't feed those who are not hungry."

"But you never knew hungrier people," said May Ca'line.

"They must realize it themselves," returned Mrs. Chetwyn. "Rejoice always, and love always. Fear not, and wait."

"It's hard to wait."

"Not when you remember God. Commit thy way unto Him and He will bring it to pass. Think right yourself, that is your part. Take a long view. This world is not all."

May Ca'line went away feeling exalted, as she always did after a talk with this woman.

When, later, she met the chauffeur before the drug-store she realized gladly that subterfuge was no longer necessary and that after this he could call for her at her home.

Ferdy smiled upon her as she entered to-day. "You're Mr. Laird's mother," he said. "Why did n't you tell me that in the first place?"

"How did I know you'd be interested?"

Hansen was more than ever beaming this afternoon. Mr. Breed's visit to his son this morning had been comparatively cheerful and the father had left with a lighter heart than he had carried for months. May Ca'line also was a pleasant object to observe in the relief and cheer of the improved situation. Hansen felt that the change for the better noticeable in her appearance was largely owing to his own tact and benevolence.

"Of course I'm interested," returned Ferdy. "Laird is a real fellow. He shows up great side of men like Frothingham and the other chaps hovering around Vivian."

"I'm glad you like him. I do, too, strange as it may seem. He wants to come to see you, now you're so near. Shall I tell him he may?"

"Oh, don't bother him. He can't want to come. That's rot."

"He does. He told me so this morning."

"Well, wait until I'm better worth seeing."

May Ca'line smiled with pleasure and glanced up at Hansen, who nodded appreciation of the implied hope.

"You knew your son was in dad's office. I do think it's queer you did n't tell me."

"I did n't know you were interested in mothers," replied May Ca'line; "I thought grandmothers were more in your line. I was only sorry I could n't truthfully say I was a great-grandmother. I knew you'd love me just that much more."

Ferdy smiled. "I guess I was a grouch. I was dead tired of that cackling bunch at Rose Ledge."

"If your sister's friends are as delightful as she is, I'd like to hear them cackle. I suppose I don't ever see fashionable people where I go — in street-cars and walking; but, Ferdy, I'm thinking of writing an article for the paper on the rouge habit."

"Oh, yes, you said you were from the country. The mural decorations look queer to you, eh?"

"They might *decorate* if they would only look the part. What I object to is their expression. When people put on eighteen-year-old cheeks they ought to take off a forty-year-old, *blasé* expression. Eighteen is joyous, hopeful. It does n't look at you out of cynical eyes and have a mouth like a slit."

"Oh, you're far too particular," replied Ferdy. Then to the amazement of his companion he added, "I think I'll just take a squint at you, no matter what breaks." With a sudden movement he pushed the bandage up from his eyes, and looked, blinking, straight into May Ca'line's face.

He pulled it down. "Yes," he said, "you look just as I expected."

"I hope you liked it well enough to look at me again sometime."

"I'm going to," was the reply.

Nothing more was said on the subject, and May Ca'line began to read aloud from a history which Hansen had ready. They took "Treasure Island" for dessert.

When she left that day, she asked the chauffeur to drive her to Mr. Breed's office.

Joe was busy at his desk when an office boy entered his room. "Somebody to see you," he said.

Joe looked up. "Well, who?"

"Says she's your mother," returned the boy, grinning.

"Show her in."

Joe rose and came to the door, thinking some catastrophe must have occurred at home. As his mother approached, her face reassured him.

"You gave me a start," he said, closing the door, and kissing her, "but you look happy. Mother," he added, looking her over from head to foot and remembering the office boy's grin, "you must have some new clothes."

"Oh, I hate to have you go to the expense, Joe. There's no one to see me, you know. I want to talk to Mr. Breed. Is he busy?"

"No one to see you, eh?" returned Joe, smiling; "and you wish to see Mr. Breed. Don't you know you ought to be in gala attire to visit him?"

"It will be good for him to have a change. He sees enough gala attire. Where shall I find him? Is that his room?" nodding toward a closed door.

"Have you an appointment?" asked Joe, with mock seriousness.

"That's what the boy out there asked me. I told him at first that I wanted to see Mr. Breed; then when he looked as if I was crazy I suggested seeing you. Of course I have n't any appointment, but I do want to see him."

"Sit down, honey. I'll inquire whether it is no thoroughfare at present. There's no one with him."

Joe went to his desk and touched a button. Some answer returned to him through a 'phone and he replied, "My mother wishes to see you if you are disengaged."

In a minute the door of the sanctum opened and

Adam Breed appeared. He came forward and greeted the visitor. "No bad news, I hope," he said.

"No, indeed, good news. Ferdy lifted up his eye bandage and looked at me. He put it back, but he said nothing of its being painful."

Adam Breed's countenance cleared. He turned toward Joe, "I doubt if it could be painful to look at her, don't you?"

"I was just telling her she must have some new clothes," returned Joe, proud and pleased.

"Never mind trifles," said May Ca'line quickly. "I have come on a serious errand, and if you don't mind, Mr. Breed, I'd like Joe to hear what I have to say."

"Very well. Come in this way, please." He ushered them into his room and they all sat down.

May Ca'line at once began to speak, and the other two gave close attention.

"One day in a park I met your friend, Mrs. Chetwyn. She saw me crying and came right to me. She talked to me beautifully. She gave me a new outlook on life. Everything has been easier ever since. I've never had a long enough quiet time alone with Joe to tell him about it. Through her I came to read to your boy. She has taught me to know that God is responsible for everything good. Adam, do you believe in God?"

Joe sat transfixed at the use of the Christian name, and the amazing intimacy of the question.

Mr. Breed's face wore its business mask, but May Ca'line did not heed that. His opinion of her was the least of her anxieties at the present moment.

"I do, yes," he replied stiffly.

"I wonder if you worship the real One, or an Idol, the way I did. Mrs. Chetwyn walks in the footsteps

of Jesus. She not only preaches the gospel, but she heals the sick. I told her she must see Ferdy. She said you did n't wish her to come to him. She said that one cannot feed those who are not hungry. Adam, can you stand between your boy and a woman who knows how to invoke God for him?"

"This is mere excitement," returned Mr. Breed. "The science of the medical world is what I must rely upon."

"Why in the world, when it does n't do anything? Not in this case. Let me go and talk to Ferdy's doctor. He's probably a big man, a big, good man. *He* would n't be afraid of a good woman's prayers if you are. Don't you know the doctor is at his wits' end? Don't you know he has come to the place where all he can say is, 'Keep the boy cheerful and humor him'? Now, Adam, you've been trusting Ferdy to me and I am convinced that if I could raise his spirits as they have been raised this week, Mrs. Chetwyn can do more. Everything is in favor of trying it. She has taken care of him through illness before. He likes her. Give me the right. Leave it all to me. You'll see your boy every day and judge whether he is improving or going backward. I love him, too, remember."

Adam Breed frowned slightly toward the glowing face and beseeching eyes, then turned toward his secretary with a sudden smile.

"She'd make a good Salvation Army lass, eh?" he said.

"By George, sir, I'd let her go her own gait if I were you," replied Joe.

Mr. Breed turned back to her. "I shall need to have a talk with the doctor first. He is not using the electrical treatments now. Hansen gives a fine massage and

I believe that, and feeding, is all that is being done at present."

"When, *when* will you see him? To-night?"

"I could."

"Then, do. Will you? I'd rather go myself."

"Mother, mother, dear," said Joe gently.

May Ca'line blinked and gave a little start. "Yes, of course. I beg pardon. You must go, Mr. Breed, and then, if the doctor approves, will you call up Mrs. Chetwyn and ask her to meet me there to-morrow — say at three-thirty?"

"You don't believe in letting anybody get his breath, do you?" said Adam Breed.

"No; such a very little breath is necessary for this." The visitor's face grew slowly radiant again, until it looked as Adam Breed had seen it raised above his boy's bowed head, and she met his gaze with eyes full of light. "Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient," she said softly. "You will get your boy back again, Adam. Good-bye."

She rose quickly and walked straight out of the sanctum. Joe followed her, and Mr. Breed, rising, looked after them.

That afternoon some of Gladys Laird's neighbors saw a handsome motor stop before her door and saw step out of it the quaint little figure whom they had learned to be her mother-in-law. They watched the chauffeur touch his cap and saw her smile good-bye to him before she ran up the steps.

Gladys noted it also from the porch where she sat sewing. The happiness in her mother-in-law's face turned the knife in her wound and she gave her only a brief nod of greeting.

May Ca'line, however, forced herself to sit down near her. "The boy seemed a little better to-day," she said.

"That's good," responded Gladys, not lifting her eyes from her sewing.

"Where are the children?"

"In the yard," was the answer. The younger woman's attitude was calm, cold, aloof, quite different, May Ca'line felt, from any of her previous moods.

"I was thinking as I came home of asking you if you would n't like me to take charge of the children until noon every day, dress them in the morning, and take them off your mind for that period until you go away."

Gladys looked slowly up at her. "Am I going away?" she asked quietly. There was that in her somber eyes that made her companion very uncomfortable.

"I understood so — on your vacation. Joe was telling me to-day how near by are various resorts. It is lovely to be so near the sea. It will be fine for you and him and the children to get off by yourselves for a couple of weeks. Even if you want to take Nora as nurse I can get on perfectly alone. You know I lived so in Leacock and I have no fear."

Gladys resumed her sewing. "You have it all planned, have n't you?" she said.

"Why — why, Joe has, I believe."

"Where have you seen Joe?"

"At his office. I wanted to talk to Mr. Breed about Ferdy — his son."

"Perhaps Joe will tell me his plans sometime."

May Ca'line could not bear the oppressive atmosphere longer. A tangible pall seemed to hang over her. Each thing she said seemed to be a mistake. She rose

and hesitated. "May I help you mornings with the children?" she asked.

Gladys again raised her dark glance to her with a strange smile. "As if you needed to ask my permission to do anything here," she replied. "Our benefactress."

May Ca'line's eyes stung, and as she entered the house, she saw the staircase through a mist. "Only a week more," she thought, "and they will be going. I can bear it until then. Surely two weeks away alone with Joe and the sea breezes will make her feel differently. She will come back a new woman, and I will have found a room outside so they can have their little home undisturbed. Poor child, she is very unhappy!"

Joe came home that night in unusually good spirits. That interview between his awe-inspiring employer and his mother had been as amazing as it was interesting to him. May Ca'line had evidently not been at all aware of her own temerity, nor thought of herself in the least, and her son admired her more than ever, accustomed as he was to seeing people kowtow to the railroad magnate.

Gladys was still sewing on the porch when he came up the steps. The children safe in bed, she had come out again into the shade of the cucumber vine. He greeted her and sank into a chair.

"Well, vacation is in sight at last," he said.

"Yes, your mother was just telling me."

Joe laughed. "Gad, Gladys, you ought to have seen her stand up to the Governor to-day. Called him Adam. I nearly fell off my chair."

"H'm," assented Gladys, sewing busily; "that was exciting." Her colorless tone and manner were so unusual that it gave her husband pause.

"Still have the headache?" he asked solicitously, for she did indeed look pale. "I think it's about time you got out of here as well as myself. Mr. Breed announced to-day that I could go in a week and stay for three weeks if we wished."

"That's good," returned Gladys, still with a calm that seemed portentous.

Her husband gazed at her downcast face. "What do you say to Breakers Beach?"

"That's a good place," returned Gladys.

"She must be going to be ill," thought Joe; but recalling the talk at last night's dinner-table he considered that it might be she had received a chastening which determined her to turn over a new leaf.

"I never realized mother's quaint appearance so much as when she walked into the office to-day. I wonder if you would n't go with her to-morrow morning, Gladys, and get her something to wear that looks less like a hand-down from Mrs. Noah."

His wife looked up at him with the same slow gaze she had bestowed on May Ca'line. "Something ready-made, you mean?"

"Yes. This is the season they sell off everything cheap, is n't it? You've always told me so. You might get something for yourself at the same time."

Gladys gave a faint smile and returned to her work. "It would be of no use for me to go with her. Our tastes would n't agree. Better just hand her your check-book and let her go alone."

Joe ignored the thrust.

"She is too timid and inexperienced to go alone," he replied.

"Then go with her yourself."

"Me? Would n't I be a bull in a china shop!"

During dinner and the evening Gladys kept her pose of silence and docility. Her attitude was as if she stood outside the plans and movements of her household. She retired early again that night, leaving Joe and his mother *tête-à-tête*.

"That poor child is very unhappy," said May Ca'line when Gladys had gone upstairs.

"Well, she swallowed a quite large pill last night," he rejoined. "She needed it, mother — and deserved it," he added, the line deepening in his forehead.

His mother looked at him fondly.

"I can hardly wait for you to get away on the vacation," she said.

"You are coming, too, you know," he returned.

"Not for the world!" declared May Ca'line. "You and Gladys need to be by yourselves and at leisure. You need a holiday from everything but each other and the children."

The hard expression of her boy's face as he returned her look startled her. "You must be very tender with her, Joe. She has n't had advantages or training. Our natures blossom under love and patience, remember."

"I've had patience," he replied.

"Yes, you have, dear, but she will show a more attractive side when you are alone and you have nothing to do but show her little attentions."

"Mother, I wish you would come," he said gravely.

"Never, my dear. You do wrong to wish it."

"I thought that you two might take excursions together and I could go fishing, perhaps — deep-sea fishing that women would n't care for."

"My boy?" she said gently.

He drew a deep breath and shook his head, as if throwing off some incubus. "By the way, we're going on a toot to-morrow morning, you and I," he said.

"What sort?"

"I'm going to take you to one of our big shops and let somebody that knows how dress you."

"Joe, dear, Gladys won't like that."

"She knows it. I've told her. It has simply got to be done."

May Ca'line smiled up at him. "Are you ashamed of me, dear?"

"No — of myself," returned Joe crisply. "I don't know anything about such things, but when you came into the office to-day I knew something had to be done."

"Did I look like the original country cousin?" she laughed.

Joe bowed his head on her little shoulder and she caressed it.

"I," he said deliberately, "am the original gump and bonehead. I have only one thing to be proud of and that is that you are my mother. I've been wanting to ask you something," he added, sitting up suddenly. "Tell me why you don't want a room near us. Tell me the honest reason why you insist upon making the sacrifice that I know it must be to you to stay on here in discomfort?"

"It was for love of you, dear, but I believe now that it was not wise. I've decided to go. I've decided to accept your offer, but not until you come back from your vacation. I will watch the house and see that it does n't run away while you are gone."

"It had better be a regular boarding-place," said Joe. "I thought at first that you could have a room and come

here for meals, but I think now that the other way would be happier for you."

"I do, too," rejoined May Ca'line quietly. "I can make a search while you are gone."

There followed a silence during which each believed he understood the thoughts of the other, and the mother was glad that her boy had accepted a half-truth.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A TEA-PARTY

MAY CA'LINE and her boy forgot all cares and problems for one hour the next morning, save only the vexed question of clothes; vexed for May Ca'line because she feared to buy something too expensive for Joe's pocket-book and for him because of chafing at an unaccustomed and bewildering environment.

"You've been too generous, Joe, that is the only trouble," she said as he looked upon her at last with pride and satisfaction. "I hope it won't worry Gladys. You see, I can tell her it is instead of a vacation trip for me. I shall tell Ferdy he will surely have to look at me to-day."

They parted and May Ca'line started home with some apprehension, but she knew that Gladys was aware of their errand and would be prepared for the result. Again, as on yesterday, the young woman's manner was a puzzle. She appeared to be laboring under repressed excitement. Spots of color burned in her cheeks. There were shadows under her eyes, but she said little. She appeared to be abstracted at the lunch-table and May Ca'line remarked her manner of gazing at the children, apparently unconscious of the quarrelsome racket into which they fell before the meal was over, saying no word of rebuke. "You're very fine, are n't you?" was the only comment she made on the transformation in her mother-in-law's appearance.

"Yes; I was saying to Joe that these clothes are in-

stead of a vacation trip. I think I shall be more credit to both of you now that I look as if I belonged to the present century."

Gladys made no response to this.

May Ca'line's instinct that the children would feel the lure of the Breed motor proved correct that afternoon. They were on the porch with their mother when the car drew up.

"Where you going, grandmother?" they cried in unison as May Ca'line in her pretty silken raiment tripped down the steps. The novel elegance of her with the bachelor buttons in her hat impressed even their youthful minds.

"I'm going visiting, dears. I'll be home pretty soon."

"We want to go to ride," shouted the twins.

"Mother, can't we go with grandmother?"

Gladys looked at the car in silence, and they pulled her dress to attract her attention. "Mother, can't we go riding with grandmother?"

"Hush," said Gladys vaguely, "you'll be going some day."

"We'll have a picnic to-morrow," May Ca'line called back before she stepped into the car.

"I think she's mean. I think we might go," said Ella, pouting.

Her mother smiled at her strangely, and patted Bob's hand where it clutched her skirt. "Did n't you hear what your grandmother said — that you will have a picnic to-morrow?"

"I'm glad," declared the more optimistic Bob. "I love grandmother more than anybody but daddy."

Gladys winced and her strongly marked eyebrows drew together.

"Run away, both of you," she said breathlessly. "After a while Nora is going to take you to the movie."

May Ca'line, relieved that the ordeal had passed without any stinging remarks from her daughter-in-law, gave herself over to thoughts of how she should talk to Ferdy this afternoon to bring about the desire of her heart for his welfare.

When she entered the library Hansen welcomed her with his usual beaming smile, but his eyes rested on her with surprise and admiration.

"Mrs. Laird looks very fine," he said.

"What does he mean?" asked Ferdy as she took his hand.

"I've turned into a lady of fashion; that's what he means. I belong in the shiny car now. This morning my boy took me to the biggest store I ever saw and told them to dress me up, and they did. Isn't my hat pretty, Hansen?"

"Madam looks ten years younger than one week ago," returned the nurse sincerely.

"Look here," said Ferdy, grinning; "it seems to me I'm curing you, instead of your curing me."

"That's the very thing that's happening," said May Ca'line. "I was eating my heart out when I first came here, and you've given me so much else to eat, both materially and mentally, that I feel like a new being. Don't you want to look at me once before I take my hat off? You don't often get such an opportunity."

"I shall have to," replied the boy, and again he pushed up his bandage and took a blinking, fleeting view of his reader.

"You're a peach," he said as he dropped it, "and that hat's a beaut."

May Ca'line's slow smile faded. She handed her hat to the waiting Hansen. "Did your eyes give you any pain that time, Ferdy?"

"No."

"Why don't you try it a little longer, then?"

"I like the feeling of the bandage," he replied; "I like the feeling of being shut away. I don't want anything of the world since it does n't want anything of me."

Hansen withdrew softly and closed the door. The morning had not been cheerful and he was very glad to hand his charge over to the reader.

"I've come to-day very full of a new idea, Ferdy," she began.

"Ten to one it's a cheerful one," he responded languidly.

"Very. Very, indeed. You have a chance to make me very happy."

"Oh, yes, I'm a power, I am."

"Just by being patient, Ferdy."

"Patient!" he repeated with sudden emphasis; "have n't I been? I tell you, I *invented* patience."

"Yes, dear, I know; but this is different. It is to be patient with a new idea. I want to talk to you about an all-powerful God and His will."

"Oh, forget it!" exclaimed Ferdy. "Did n't one of dad's friends come in to see me at Rose Ledge and bore me to death with talk of being resigned to God's will? I knew *her*, all right. I knew she would n't be resigned to it if His will had n't been that she should have everything under the sun that she could think of."

"Yes; I'm not going to talk to you that way. I've come here to-day to tell you not to be resigned to sickness."

"That's easy."

"Sometimes and sometimes not. It seems bred in our very bones to respect illness and bow down to its power. I've become convinced, Ferdy, that sickness is n't God's will, and that when we say, 'Thy will be done,' we're calling on health of body as well as of mind. Else why did Jesus make all the cures and never refuse anybody who asked him? Besides doing this Himself, He said over and over again that all who believed should do the same work He did, and He *commanded* them to do it. Mrs. Chetwyn says that for two hundred years and more after His time they did do it, and then thought became less and less spiritual and more and more material until the healing power was lost. Now a few people are waking up to this power again, and consecrating their lives to it. Mrs. Chetwyn is one. Your own dear friend. She has been the means of healing illness repeatedly. What I want is for you to let her come and talk to you. If she can show you that you are a victim and that you don't need to submit, won't we be happy? Radiantly happy? Have you ever guessed, Ferdy, what it is that I love better than books and reading? It is boys; and at present you are *the* boy. My heart is wrapped up in the idea of getting you out of that chair and on your two feet again, and when I think that God wants it, too, and that Omnipotence works according to its own law, and that we have a friend who knows that law, do you wonder I have to hold on to my eagerness?"

"Mrs. Laird, you are very kind to care so much," replied the boy, touched by his companion's sincere fervor.

"I'm very ignorant about it all as yet, but I'm

studying, and loving the idea of a God of Love and Intelligence. I went to see your father yesterday and he has asked the doctor, who has no objection to our trying, and I'm expecting Mrs. Chetwyn now to come in and talk with you — if you want her."

Could Ferdy have seen the appealing eyes that waited for his answer!

"Well, I'd like to want whatever you want," he replied. "Do you suppose she will stay so long we can't read?"

"No; we'll read first. She won't come for half an hour yet. I went to the drug-store this morning and telephoned her and made the arrangement."

"I like her very much," said Ferdy coolly. "I'll see her any time. Go right on in the history, will you, please, from the place you left off yesterday?"

When, later, Hansen came in to announce Mrs. Chetwyn, May Ca'line went out to the sheeted and shaded reception-room to meet her. To her surprise she found Adam Breed there also. They both remarked the altered appearance of the little lady, but May Ca'line had forgotten all about her fine feathers.

"Have you had a talk with Mrs. Chetwyn, Mr. Breed?" she asked, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, for the last hour," he returned. "She has given me her — her working hypothesis, perhaps you might call it."

He smiled, speaking as one who would be lenient.

"How does Ferdy feel about seeing me?" asked Mrs. Chetwyn.

"He is willing," returned May Ca'line. "I will come in with you and get my hat."

When they entered the room and Mrs. Chetwyn

greeted the sick boy, he turned his head restlessly. "Mrs. Laird?"

"Yes?" returned May Cal'ine, pinning on her hat.

"You're not going away?"

"I'd rather leave you alone for your talk, Ferdy."

"But you must come back to give Mrs. Chetwyn tea."

"All right, I shall be glad to. In half an hour, then?"

Mrs. Chetwyn smiled and nodded and May Ca'line went out.

She found Adam Breed walking up and down the dim, impressive hall.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"No; I'm to wait for half an hour, and then Ferdy wants me to come back for tea."

"I wonder if I could n't get in on that tea-party."

"Of course. You should." May Ca'line met his eyes gravely. "It is a celebration, Adam."

"You are very enthusiastic."

"How did you like Mrs. Chetwyn's ideas?"

"I found them interesting."

"You could n't help that."

"No. At the same time I don't think I should ever be prepared to turn my mental world topsy-turvy and put every one of my carts before the horses."

"But supposing you found you had always been mistaken in the way you harnessed your horse, and that the cart went much better with the horse hitched right? I can see that the interesting part of this philosophy is that it is n't all talk; that you can prove it is truth as you go along. Of course, it is all new to me. I have to see it proved as much as you do, only I believe it will be."

"And I hope it will be," responded Adam Breed

gravely. "We have half an hour to wait. Suppose we drive a bit?"

"How many motors have you?" asked May Ca'line, sinking into the cushions of the open car which was waiting at the curb.

"I come to business in this one," responded her companion. "It is a pretty drive from my country place. You must come out to Rose Ledge some day."

"I should like to. I met your charming daughter."

"How goes everything in Leacock now?"

"Just the same, or nearly. We did n't think Leacock could ever change, but since I came away it has a movie theater and" — May Ca'line's brightness faded — "and my old home has been bought and is being made over into a modern, stylish sort of place."

"You speak as if you did n't like the idea."

"At first it was a blow; but I realize that that was a foolish feeling. It had gone out of my possession, anyway, and there is nothing to call me back there. Do you remember Hetty Woodward and Martha Sharp?"

"Vaguely."

"I think Martha was married to Simon Berry about the time you left. They have been the best of friends to me and their letters tell me of the doings in Leacock. They are very much in love with the charming young man who has bought — bought my old home. A Mr. Frothingham. He seems to have put new life into the sleepy town."

"That's not a bad use for your old home, May."

"No, I realize that, and as Martha said, when I was leaving with fear and trembling to come to Joe, we can't help one chapter closing and another beginning in this changing world."

Adam Breed regarded her quizzically. "You look as if you were beginning a new chapter to-day, yourself."

"I am," she returned, looking up at him earnestly. "You don't know how I felt when I closed that door on Mrs. Chetwyn and Ferdy."

"No, I don't mean that, you little fashion-plate."

"Oh, really?" May Ca'line laughed and blushed. "Think of that dear, big Joe taking me and dressing me up like a doll, and me scared all the time for fear he was spending too much."

"He got his money's worth," returned Adam Breed, regarding her.

"It is so long since I have had anything new that I should probably be thinking about my clothes all the time if it were not for Ferdy. He saves me from the sin of vanity. He is such a dear, Adam. I said to him to-day how hard it was to realize that we have been acquainted only a week, we seem such old friends, and he replied that to people in his position minutes were days."

Adam Breed turned his head away. A cloud fell over his face and his companion saw it.

"We must n't be late to that tea," she said brightly. "We must make it a little festival."

And they did. May Ca'line when she went in looked eagerly at the patient. She would not have been surprised to see the eye bandage gone and to have him greet her standing.

He lay in the same position and Mrs. Chetwyn rose from her seat beside him.

"Ferdy, I have asked your father to have tea with us," said May Ca'line.

He turned his face toward her and smiled. "So we

are giving a party," he answered, and she drank in his pleasant and gentle tone.

Adam Breed followed and greeted his boy; and the tea-cart, well laden, glided up to its place beside the chair.

May Ca'line and Mrs. Chetwyn drove home together and the latter responded to the dumb, eager questioning of the other's eyes.

"He was very courteous," she said. "He did n't argue. I don't know whether he listened to all that I said, but he agreed passively to put himself under my care and follow my directions. He made it very clear, however, that it was for your sake."

"Is that any harm?" asked May Ca'line anxiously.

Mrs. Chetwyn smiled. "No harm. It is his manifestation of love at present, and Love is the gateway."

As May Ca'line left the car at her door she took her friend's hand. "It has been a wonderful day!" she said; "I am very happy. It is so easy to rejoice just now."

Mrs. Chetwyn threw her a kiss as the car moved on.

"I wonder what time it is," thought May Ca'line, turning toward the house; "I must be very late."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AT SUNSET

THERE was no one on the porch and May Ca'line hastened into the house. She met Nora coming downstairs with a rather irritated look on her usually good-natured countenance.

"Sure, Mrs. Laird has a right to be home to put the children to bed. I've enough to do without that," she sputtered.

"Is it so late?" asked May Ca'line contritely. "I ought to have been here myself to help you, but Mrs. Laird prefers to care for the children. She has never failed to be home by this time. Where is she?"

"Find Mr. Bir-rd and ye'll know," answered the girl pertly.

"Please don't say such things, Nora," said May Ca'line with gentle dignity. "Mr. Laird will be home any minute now. Perhaps she is with him. Where did she say she was going?"

"Sure, I left her here whin I wint off with the children to the four-o'clock movie. She did n't speak o' goin' out, but not wishin' to displease ye, mum, it's a bad sign whin she sinds me to the theayter with 'em instead o' goin' herself." Nora gave a quick and knowing nod and passed on toward the kitchen.

May Ca'line went upstairs to her room. The door into the nursery was open and sounds of revelry were heard. Two bumps on the floor were followed by little white-clad figures pushing by each other, hastening in to meet her.

"Oh, darlings, run right back," she said, kissing them and pushing them before her. Evidently the novelty of Nora's ministrations had destroyed the usual system. "It's time for daddy to come home, and probably mother is with him. Now, get right into bed and be ready for them."

"But we're going on a picnic to-morrow," said Ella.

"Yes, yes, indeed we are."

"And there'll be jam," said Bob.

"There certainly will be if mother is willing. Now, hop in. I hear daddy now. He'll have a few splashes in the nice, cold water and then you'll get a good tossing to get ready for the Sandman."

"Who's the Sandman?"

"Don't you know about him? Well, to-morrow at the picnic I'll tell you. He's a dear little man."

"Not so nice as daddy," declared Bob.

"No, he does n't toss you a bit. That wakes you up. It's his business to put you to sleep. Let me go and tell mother that her birdies are safe in the nest."

May Ca'line went back to her own room and soon her son appeared. "Did Gladys come in with you?"

"Why, is n't she here?"

"No, I expected she would come in with you."

He gave a little grunt. "H'm. The pavilion too fascinating to leave this afternoon, probably."

"What pavilion?"

"A place for outdoor dancing where the girls like to go sometimes in the afternoon."

He passed into the nursery for his uproarious welcome. May Ca'line stood in the doorway and watched the romp, during which her grandchildren were obtaining an acrobatic training.

Joe had found it an economy of labor not to brush his hair until this daily experience was passed, and, laughing now, he went out through his mother's room and into his own.

As he approached the chiffonier and took up his brushes he saw a letter addressed to himself in Gladys's handwriting. She had probably gone out to the suburb to spend the night at her mother's.

He brushed his hair leisurely, then opened the letter.

May Ca'line went downstairs. The best of Noras require placating at times, and she desired to-night to respond promptly to the dinner call, even though the mistress of the house were tardy. She went into the living-room and sat down to wait for Joe, disagreeable visions haunting her of possible scenes at the dancing pavilion which were causing her daughter-in-law to forget the time and home duties. As she sat there on the divan, her head leaning back against a pillow, her feet crossed before her, there was a sudden sound of swift steps on the stairs, and her son, very pale, strode into the room and, seating himself beside her, dropped an open letter into her lap.

"I just found this. Read it, mother."

May Ca'line, starting up from her easy posture, dropped her troubled gaze from his excited face to the letter. It began without preamble:—

I can't stand this any longer, Joe, and my mind is made up. If you love me you conceal it and there is another man who does love me and shows it. I've only got one life to live and I want to be loved as happy women are. It is my right and I intend to take it. It may be that you still care for me more than you or I realize and I'm going to give you a chance. I am still your wife. I've never done anything that the world calls wicked. You're a good, plodding boy. I want to do you

full justice. People would call you a good husband. You have n't any vices and all you've earned you've spent on your family, but I can't stand our milk-and-water existence any longer. If you were as crazy about me as you were when we were married, I would n't have any kick even if we are poor, but I'm sick of being treated like a piece of furniture when there's another man who wants to treat me like a queen. So, as I say, I'm going to give you a chance. I'm going to give you to-night to see me and tell me the truth. I shall be at the roadhouse, the Three Crows, until midnight. If you are not there by twelve o'clock, I shall know you agree to my adopting any course I please. If you do come, it must be in the spirit in which you came courting. If I go back with you, it must be to a new life. Your mother must not live with us. You may wonder how I can leave the children. She has estranged them from me and you don't trust my care of them. Her opinion is law to you. If you love me, you will tell her she must move.

I am going to the pavilion now, but by the time you can get to the Three Crows I shall be there ready to receive you.

Every woman wants a lover and I am going to have one. If you can fill the bill, you have the first right, and no other need apply. It all lies with yourself, but, mind you, I accept no imitation. I am going to *live*!

GLADYS

When May Ca'line finished she looked into her boy's pallid face. The line was deep in his forehead and his lips were stern.

Nora threw open the door into the living-room, as a sign that dinner was served.

"Come out and eat, dear. Come quickly." May Ca'line spoke softly and rose, seizing his hand. "You'll feel stronger. Is the place, that roadhouse, far away?"

"I'm not going," said Joe.

"My son," exclaimed May Ca'line, "you *are* going!"

Joe shook his head, then rested it on his hands, his elbows on his knees.

His mother had grown as pale as he. She looked at

him in silence for a moment, then moved quickly out to the kitchen where Nora was startled at her expression.

"We have heard from Mrs. Laird, and she is in great trouble, Nora. Mr. Laird is going to get her and bring her home. I want him to eat before he leaves. I must go back to him now." She hurried out and Nora stood staring after her, her imagination shrewdly busy.

As May Ca'line approached the divan again, Joe looked up. His mother sat down beside him, took his hand, and spoke swiftly and softly.

"That is the reason why I have insisted on staying in your house, dear. I found almost as soon as I arrived that a flattering thief was trying to steal your wife's affections, and I felt I could be some restraint upon him by remaining in the house. I did n't know what to do. I could n't talk to you about it. I don't know whether I was weak or strong not to, for my heart was full of sorrow." May Ca'line's voice trembled.

Joe patted her hand. "You mean Bird, I suppose," he returned, memories returning to him. "Poor Gladys, he's a very cheap specimen. She'll regret it."

"She will not have a chance," declared May Ca'line fiercely, her tears dried suddenly. "Pull yourself together, Joe. Come and eat something and hurry away."

"I tell you I'm not going," he replied doggedly. "Don't you understand this is my way out? You must have seen a hundred times that the greatest boon that could come to me would be a way out."

"I refuse to believe that my son is a coward," returned May Ca'line. "I cannot believe that my boy allows another man to steal his wife."

"Wait, mother. If I go to the Three Crows, shoot Bird if he happens to be there before his date, and bring

Gladys home, what then? You don't seem to have taken in the terms of the letter. I don't love her and I could n't cheat her into believing that I did even if I tried my very best night and day."

"Joe, dear, I pity you," declared his mother, her arm suddenly thrown about his broad shoulders, "but I see as clear as sunlight what is your duty. Bring Gladys home. I will disappear as far away as she likes. Put your mind on giving her more diversion, more variety, more pretty clothes. That satisfies a woman of her type."

Joe shook his head. "No, she wants caresses and flattery. She wants to be made love to. I simply can't do it. However much I may be disgraced as a husband who could n't hold his wife, it is an impossibility."

May Ca'line looked at him steadily. "You have thought only of yourself so far. Think of Bob and Ella."

"They're too young to know."

"My boy, school-children will tell them. They will grow up under a stigma. Somewhere their mother will be living criminally with another man. Their lives will be blighted by it. Can you do that to them, Joe?"

He wavered, bit his pale lips, then looked at his mother straight. "There is another factor," he said. "I love another woman."

"Oh, my boy! Oh! Oh!" May Ca'line winced and a spasm of pain passed over her face.

"She does n't know it. She never will. I have n't known it long, myself. I should n't tell her if I were free, but it is the greatest comfort I have, to love her, and I shall go on simply because I can't help myself."

"That is beside the question, then. The thing for you

to do is to go to Gladys to-night, tell her you have done wrong in not considering more her love of diversion. Tell her that I am going away at once. Talk of the children; talk of the trip you are going to have together, and tell her it will be your study to make it a happy one for her. Appeal to her better feelings. I can see now how I have been an irritation here. Her very discourtesy to me has kept her in a bad mental atmosphere. After you bring her back, a few words from you to Mr. Bird will frighten him away in future, and, oh, Joe, you'll be doing *right*. If you let twelve o'clock to-night come and pass without an effort to redeem that poor girl from a fatal mistake, you will be committing a sin against God, against your children, and against their mother and yours. Don't refuse me, Joe. To-morrow will be too late and to-morrow you will wish you had listened to the voice of conscience."

"I don't hear any," returned Joe dully, "but — but I'll go."

"Come and eat something, dear child," said May Ca'line tenderly. "There is time. It is only seven-thirty now."

"I can't eat," he answered. He rose slowly, went into the hall, and with no farewell took his hat and went out into the summer evening.

May Ca'line, biting her lips to check their trembling, and with tears coursing down her cheeks, picked up the fallen letter and read it through again.

Joe Laird felt like one moving in a dream. The only motive power of which he was conscious was his mother's will. He boarded a street-car and as it crashed and ground along the rails he tried to formulate what he would say to his wife when he reached her, but as in a

nightmare his mind refused to work. Just one sentence repeated itself over and over. "I can't let you do this, Gladys. I can't let you do this, Gladys." Beyond that his imagination would not go.

At one point the car stopped and a couple of gayly dressed, laughing girls got on. One of them descried him and paused on her way to a seat.

"Hello, Joe," she said. "Why don't you get off early any more and come over to the pavilion? Better look out for Gladys. We left her drinking a highball with a handsomer man." She giggled gayly.

His brain cleared instantly. This girl represented Gladys's world. An instinct for her defense sprang up within him.

"Yes, we have a date," he answered; "I'm on my way to meet her now."

The girl nodded and passed on. "Joe Laird is a sick-looking man to me," she said to her companion. "I should think Gladys would be worried about him."

Joe began to think of the children who adored him; of all the explanations that would have to be made to them as they grew older, and of what his mother had said of blighted lives. He began again and with more success to plan what he would say to Gladys — Gladys drinking highballs in a public place with Henry Bird. Physical nausea beset him as he left the car at the point nearest his destination. He had been too busy at noon to go out for lunch and his misery took the form of faintness, against which he strove. Gladys had called him a plodding man. He plodded now, every step an effort, in the direction of the popular roadhouse. As he reached the boulevard on which it was situated, motors in a stream began to pass before him.

In one of the open cars he thought he recognized Henry Bird with a veiled woman beside him, but a large limousine intervened and the smaller car was speeding, barely avoiding other machines.

In the distance now he saw the gateway to the Three Crows, its colored bulbs already burning, although the twilight had not waned. Their lights looked garish against a delicate primrose sky.

A snarl of vehicles seemed suddenly to gather ahead of him. Joe heard a sharp impact, heard women's shrieks above the din of horns, and a crowd was gathering before he could reach the spot.

When he arrived he pushed his way through the group of men who had left the cars in which women sat leaning out, and staring, with pale faces. He saw a runabout half-crushed, and Henry Bird, bareheaded and white as death, holding a dangling right arm with his left hand, and pushing with the others toward a woman, prostrate beside one of the stone posts which guarded and ornamented the grounds of the resort.

Joe worked his way toward the center of the group. A man was leaning over Gladys, his hand above her heart. Joe recognized Adam Breed's physician, the famous Dr. Burchard. The latter looked up, saw Joe, and nodded recognition.

"Very sad," he said. "Concussion. It was instantaneous. She is gone." Gently he pressed the eyelids over the half-closed eyes. "Why, what's the matter, boy? You're ill!"

Joe fell on his knees beside the calm, sleeping face. He took one of Gladys's hands and with the other gripped that of the physician. "Help me, doctor," he uttered chokingly; "this is my wife."

"My boy! Don't give way." Dr. Burchard's firm grasp on Joe's hand did not relax as an eager reporter pushed through the crowd. The rumor passed from mouth to mouth that the husband of the dead woman was beside her.

Joe felt the paramount necessity of speaking. He rose and addressed the physician in a tone those nearest could hear.

"My wife sent word asking me to meet her here. One of our friends brought her in his car." His throat closed. The reporter wrote fast.

Some one called: "Dr. Burchard, the living needs you. There is a man here with a broken arm."

All that occurred after that passed like a dream to Joe. Everybody obeyed Dr. Burchard who dispersed the crowd, satisfied the reporter, sent Henry Bird to a hospital for treatment, and attended to the necessary formalities following the accident. Joe remained beside him during all, obedient to each necessity, his face stiff and expressionless.

May Ca'line at home was waiting in a misery of indecision. Would it be better for her to be out of the house when they came home? If she could only call Mrs. Chetwyn, but how could she explain over the telephone? Idleness was impossible. At last it occurred to her that she might pack her trunk. She went upstairs and Nora could hear her pull the venerable box over the floor.

Nora was piecing things together. She had urged May Ca'line to eat, but in vain, and the little woman had not attempted to conceal from her that they were in deep and grave trouble, but she did not explain. Nora did not consider that the situation required any

explanation. The catastrophe had arrived, that was all. Her mistress had run away.

"I could choke that Bir-rd wid me two hands," she muttered to herself, "and I hope Mr. Laird'll ketch him and do it himself."

When one long hour had passed, then two hours, and the deep silence in the house was at last broken by the dragging of the trunk, Nora ran upstairs. Her heart had been yearning over May Ca'line ever since her son went out, but she had forborne from intruding upon her.

"What are ye doin', mum?" she asked, looking in at May Ca'line's open door.

"Packing, Nora."

"Sure, are ye goin' away?"

"Yes." May Ca'line's breath caught nervously. "I've stayed here too long. I'm going some place where I will be a quite near neighbor and it will be better all around. All young wives like their homes to themselves. I don't feel strange in the city any longer, you see. I shall be quite happy, and I thought it might be a comfort to Mrs. Laird when she comes in to-night to know that I'm all ready to go to-morrow. I long, Nora," — May Ca'line fought with rising tears, — "I long to take her in my arms and tell her that I've made a mistake and that I want every minute of her life to be happy."

As May Ca'line talked she was pulling open the drawers in the closet and taking out their meager contents. On the bed lay the boxes from the department store containing the specimens of Leacock dressmaking and millinery which had been left there this morning when the silken butterfly emerged from its chrysalis.

"Well, mum, ye must do what ye think right," said Nora, sniffing dolefully and beginning to help fold the garments, "but 't will be sore here widout ye and Mrs. Laird will be no better of it. She is n't —"

A noise down in the hall interrupted.

"They've come!" exclaimed May Ca'line. "Make some fresh tea, will you, Nora, and did you slice the meat?"

"Sure, it's all ready," replied the girl. "I'd like to know what's happened to Bir-rd?" she thought vindictively.

May Ca'line hurried into the hall, and looking over the banisters saw her son below.

"Take Gladys into the dining-room, dear," she said, her voice tremulous. "Your supper is all ready."

He looked up. "Gladys is n't here, mother," he answered heavily.

The strength went out of May Ca'line's knees. Gladys had refused to come. Joe had not managed it in the right way.

She ran downstairs and into his arms.

"My child," she said, looking up at him, held in a close embrace, "you were not urgent enough. Joe, you must n't take no for an answer. You must go back, dear. You must go back at once."

He shook his head, gazing gravely into her troubled eyes.

"Gladys will never come," he said slowly. "There has been a terrible accident, but she did n't suffer; the doctor says she did n't know."

As Joe spoke he shivered as if with a chill. May Ca'line's heart seemed to stand still as she studied his face.

"Come in here, dear." She led him into the living-room and made him lie down on the divan. Little by little he told her how a hilarious party had sped in their motor out of the gate of the roadhouse and how Henry Bird, himself unfit to drive, had skidded on some slippery mud and crashed into the other car. He told her how Dr. Burchard had taken care of every detail; how he had prepared for the inquest to-morrow, and brought him home just now in his own car.

May Ca'line held her boy's hand and her delicate lips set firmly.

"What happened to Mr. Bird?" she asked.

"His arm was broken. I was able to say that Gladys had planned to meet me there and that a friend had taken her in his machine. It will all be in the paper to-morrow. I believe I thought of everything. Even Dr. Burchard suspected nothing irregular. Oh — I'm tired, mother."

May Ca'line rose and went out to bring food. She told Nora briefly what had occurred. The girl crossed herself. "The poor soul!" she exclaimed. In a shocked silence they prepared the tray and May Ca'line sat beside her son into the morning hours, nearly all the time in silence. He held her hand constantly and once he kissed it.

The next few days were full of evidences of Adam Breed's regard for his secretary. Dr. Burchard had telephoned him at once, and the next morning found him at Joe's house. One thing he could not prevent and that was the gathering of Gladys's clan. Her immediate family had been far from satisfied with Gladys in life, but now all her lapses and inattention were forgotten in the dreadful shock of her loss. They hung upon Joe and

swept over him, trying to voice consolation, yet somewhat awed by his stony quiet.

May Ca'line received them gently, but when she suggested to Gladys's mother that perhaps it would be best for the children not to look upon the lost one in her last sleep, that lady burst forth in indignant tears.

"Of course, they shall look at her!" she exclaimed. "Would you deprive them of such a sacred sorrow? She never looked more lovely. My beautiful, beautiful daughter. Oh, poor Joe, what a loss is his! When I think of his agony it helps me to bear my own."

On the morning of the funeral this other grandmother, of whom the twins had never had much knowledge, took them by the hand to the side of their mother's casket. Gifts of flowers had been lavish and there were banks of them on every side.

"But won't she ever wake up?" asked Bob, gazing with awestruck eyes at the sleeping one.

His grandmother sobbed. "Each of you shall put a flower in her hand," she gasped, and lifted them one after the other until they placed their blossoms.

"Will she give them to God?" asked Ella, shivering at the cold touch.

"I want her to wake up," said Bob, beginning to cry.

"Oh, poor children, poor children," sobbed their grandmother, "your mother is gone and the grave will close over her. Poor little ones, you have lost your mother, lost her forever."

Ella joined her brother now in loud lamentation, and taking his hand they broke away from the weeping one's embraces and rushed upstairs to May Ca'line, who soothed them as best she might. She wished to be at peace in all ways with Gladys's relatives and Joe helped

her by keeping the children with him throughout the services.

At last the sad day came to a close. The last tears had been shed, the last farewells said, the last neighbor gone. Even the Breeds and Mrs. Chetwyn had departed.

Little Bob, with his dark good looks so like his mother, had keener feeling than his sister. The emotional scene of the morning clung to him. The four were at supper together when he voiced one of many questions in his heart.

"Grandmother, won't mother ever wake up?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed, dear, and where she has gone Love is waiting for her."

"I'm glad," said Bob, his lips quivering.

"And such wonderful teachers as she will find; better than any here."

"She was cross a lot of times," remarked Ella, eating busily.

"We all need teachers," said May Ca'line, "for one thing or another. Some people don't find the right ones in this world. We shall all have to try to be very good and learn all we can, for your dear mother will be learning, and learning fast, the good things God wants us to know."

Joe Laird met the speaker's eyes fixed upon him, so full of understanding and love.

"Yes, we must help each other," he said gravely.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### AT THE SEA

THE morning after the funeral the little family of four began the new chapter by breakfasting together. Mr. Breed had told Joe to stay at home with his children to-day. The middle of the morning a limousine stopped before the door and he left it and came in.

May Ca'line had done something to the living-room, he suspected, something in the way of elimination. At any rate, it had a different aspect from that which he remembered.

She came to meet him in the blue-sprigged muslin, and her subdued welcome was sincere. "I want you to know," she said, "how much Joe and I appreciate the many rough places you have smoothed for us in the last days."

"Trifles," returned Mr. Breed, remarking her languor of look and manner, while she remarked his cool and elegant garb and appearance. "I came to see if I could n't take you all to Rose Ledge for the day."

"Thank you for the thought. Joe is outdoors with the children. We have a shady back yard and it is popular in the morning. I will send for him."

She left the room and gave the word to Nora, and her son soon appeared.

"How are you, Joe, my boy?" said Mr. Breed as the two men met and shook hands.

Since the catastrophe his employer had addressed him by his Christian name for the first time and the

young man noted it. "What would you say to a trip *en famille* out to Rose Ledge for luncheon? It is very cool and pleasant driving." As he spoke Adam Breed observed with compassion the marks of shock and strain in his secretary's face.

"Would you mind taking the others and leaving me?" returned Joe. "I'm not fit company for people to-day."

His mother looked at him wistfully.

"Vivian sent a most particular and cordial invitation," said Mr. Breed.

"I thank her very much," said Joe, "but I think I would better —" He paused.

"All right, boy. I understand. Will you come, May, and" — the speaker cleared his throat for heroic effort — "and bring the children?"

"I don't think I could. Will you tell your dear daughter how much we appreciate her thought, but that we are just tired enough and dull enough, Joe and I, not to want to inflict ourselves on any one for a few days."

"Would you inflict yourself on Ferdy for ten minutes?"

May Ca'line hesitated. "Perhaps I could come for a little while this afternoon."

Mr. Breed smiled and shook his head, motioning with his thumb over his shoulder. "I mean right now. He has come to look you up. He is out in the car."

With a little exclamation of pleasure May Ca'line hurried from the room. The neighbors, who saw everything, saw her approach the limousine, whose peculiar appearance had already excited their curiosity. A large man dressed in white occupied the seat beside the

chauffeur, and the curtains were drawn close over the windows.

Hansen, the moment he saw May Ca'line, jumped out and held open the door. She entered it and he closed it behind her.

"How good of you to come to see me, Ferdy!"

"How good of you to come out!" he answered. "I want you to know, and your son, too, how cut up I've been about this terrible thing."

"And we want you to know how we loved the flowers you sent, Ferdy. I appreciated my name being on them and I did n't send them away with the others, but placed them in my room where they have kept speaking to me of you."

Ferdy drew a long breath. "I don't know what I should have done without Mrs. Chetwyn, I've missed you so."

"Oh, Ferdy, tell me! You know there is nothing you can say to comfort me so much as to tell me that you begin to see the truth Mrs. Chetwyn knows: that you begin to feel her help."

"I do," he answered. "There is n't a doubt of it. I did n't wear the bandage at all yesterday. I did n't quite have the nerve to come out into the daylight without it this morning."

"I could weep for joy!" exclaimed May Ca'line.

"You're all too good to me," said the boy. "Dad was so happy over my improvement yesterday that it made me ashamed of my chronic grouch. I did n't tell him, Mrs. Laird, because I did n't want to raise his hopes and then have them dashed, but after Mrs. Chetwyn's third visit the numbness in my back that has made me so nervous, disappeared. I don't know what it means,

but I can feel my back against the pillow to-day. Just supposing it is the truth and that I'm going to walk again." His lips twitched.

"My dear, my dear!" said May Ca'line, pressing his hand between both her own. "Can you doubt it? I don't. I'm very thankful you have Mrs. Chetwyn to visit you now, and some day you will see me running back —"

"Not immediately?" interrupted Ferdy regretfully.

"I can't tell you just yet. An earthquake has shaken our little home and my first duty is here until we can feel somewhat settled again and until Joe does n't need me all the time."

"Poor Laird; I tell you I realize how broken up he must be," returned the boy, and May Ca'line knew it was good for him to think of another. "Remember me to him, please. I'd ask for him to come to see me, but I should n't know what to say to him if he did. When a fellow is hit by a cannon ball words don't do any good."

"But love does, Ferdy. It will do Joe good to know that you are thinking about him and I shall tell him."

Hansen here opened the door of the car and Mr. Breed approached.

"I have n't mentioned my plan for the day to Ferdy," he said. "I'll tell him going home, and the way you've turned me down." He smiled as he took May Ca'line's hand and helped her out. "Joe will tell you of the talk we have just been having."

A brief farewell and the car rolled away. May Ca'line found her boy waiting for her in the living-room.

"I never dreamed that Mr. Breed could be so human," he said, drawing his mother down beside him on the divan. "He behaves like a changed being. Did you

hear him call me 'Joe'? He has never addressed me informally once in the years I have been with him until this lightning stroke came."

"I'm sorry we could n't accept that lovely girl's kindness," returned May Ca'line.

Her son met her wistful eyes steadily. "Can't you possibly guess why I could n't — why I did n't wish to?"

They regarded each other silently for a full minute.

"Oh!" said May Ca'line, and beyond the soft exclamation said nothing.

"I did wish that you could go, mother, for you look like a wilted flower this morning, and you would have gloried in the air and sunshine and gone wild over that splendid place, and come back revived and crisp. However, Mr. Breed has fixed that all right. We are to have our vacation now instead of a week hence." Joe put his arm around her and met her eyes. "Mother, I'm happy with you," he said.

"And I thank God that I can be with you," she answered.

"The plan is all made," went on Joe. "Mr. Breed has been wonderful. He has already engaged a cottage for us near the hotel at Breakers Beach. We're to go to-morrow."

"Why, Joe, you take my breath away. Is n't it the sort of place where I shall have to wear my afternoon dress in the morning, my evening dress in the afternoon, and go to bed in the evening?"

"No, it's a rather democratic place, because it's near enough to the city for people to commute and it's rather crowded and simple, but if we have a cottage and the ocean we can keep to ourselves."

"Oh, that will be fine!" said May Ca'line, clasping

her hands in childlike delight. "Can Nora stay here alone, though?"

"No; we'll send Nora off for her vacation, too, and come back" — Joe drew a long breath — "come back, all of us made over, I hope, and begin fresh."

A busy day of packing ensued and the first smile that had visited Joe's lips for many a day was elicited by the sight of his mother's antiquated trunk. In a few hours a spick-and-span new one made its appearance with May Ca'line's initials shining on the side.

At noon the next day they were all ready to start. The neighbors on each side promised to have an eye to possible marauders. Nora was to do the last locking up and then hie away to her sister.

The twins, overcome by the magnitude of the proposed outing, each armed with a pail and shovel and certain of daddy's prolonged companionship, were seraphic in their docile behavior, and to the end of their lives remembered that day of departure. The trip was made by boat. The alternative to kind, all-powerful daddy was a gentle and resourceful grandmother, always ready to listen to them and considerate of their wishes. No impatient word or jerk awaited their actions. The water was blue, music was playing. In their infantile capacity to appreciate, it was a day of complete festival.

For two weeks the holiday lasted. Each morning before breakfast the four dressed in their cottage and ran down to the sea for a dip. May Ca'line wanted to get their breakfast at home, but Joe informed her that it was against the rule for her to do any work; so they leisurely progressed to the neighboring hotel and ate, sometimes on a veranda and sometimes in the great dining-room.

The children had not turned into saints, but incipient quarrels never went far in daddy's presence and they found that the free hand their grandmother now possessed was as firm as it was gentle. Ungentle methods were absolutely prohibited; and May Ca'line's inborn sympathy with and understanding of the young, and her self-control, made her able to bring back their little feet to the right path without storms, whenever they strayed. Nature's illimitable sand-pile was their joy and they were never tired of digging their bare feet into the warm depths of it.

One day Joe was coming back from aiding the youngsters to build a dam to hold water from incoming rollers, when he saw a wind-blown figure coming across the beach. His heart leaped to his throat. The girl came on toward him, smiling. He hastened forward.

"How did you get here, Miss Breed, and what are you doing?"

She put her gloved hand in his sea-washed one. "We came in the motor and I'm hunting for you. Daddy is up at the cottage with your mother. We thought we could have tea with you and get back to town by moonlight." Her voice was joyous and her gaze direct. "How tanned you are! How well you look! So does your mother."

"It has been great for us all," returned Joe, running his hand through his short hair which the wind had set on end. "Ten days have passed at hurricane speed. I suppose there is plenty of speed, too, at Rose Ledge."

"Yes, we have been having a gay time. Don't I look extra happy?" She did, indeed, look so brilliant that again that heart of Joe's started throatward.

"Break it to me gently," he said, smiling bravely.

"Oh, it's never a man," she laughed. The soft salt wind, the sparkling sea, and the presence that was oftenest in her thought combined to make her feel as if walking on air. "It is a boy, though — Ferdy. He is so much better."

"Is it a fact?" returned Joe eagerly.

"Indeed it is. Mrs. Chetwyn has won his complete interest and confidence. Father says it is that, but I don't think so. It is more than that. He steps, Mr. Laird. Ferdy steps with a cane."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Joe.

"I don't understand it very well, but I mean to try. The idea is that material things, the body, is never cause. Spirit is all cause, and spirit is God, hence, of course, all-powerful."

Joe nodded. "My mother seems to have grasped the idea. She has talked to me about it every evening since we have been here and she has read to me a lot. I've always found that my mother thought pretty straight."

"I'm so glad you have her, Mr. Laird." The girl's eyes, full of innocence and sincerity, looked straight into his.

"Yes, there's nobody like her," he returned.

"I did n't know how Ferdy would endure her leaving him, but Mrs. Chetwyn says that Love is always taking care of us, and certainly she was raised up for Ferdy, and, you see, your mother did even that. Mrs. Chetwyn comes and sits with him every day and reads to him; reads the Bible a great deal. Just think of it, and Ferdy likes it! Mrs. Chetwyn is jolly, too, the best kind of company. I was just telling your mother that she has a rival, and she did n't show the least bit of jealousy,

but rejoiced and rejoiced. She and daddy are having a regular love feast." The two were moving slowly across the sand toward the little house as they talked. "There they are now on the piazza," she added. "I don't believe they have anywhere near exhausted the subject."

"Mother is probably proselyting him at the present moment," remarked Joe.

"I don't know about that. He says his den at home is so full of metaphysics that he wades in it up to his knees every time he goes to see Ferdy, and after Mrs. Chetwyn talks to him a few minutes he feels as if he ought to be grunting and eating husks. Dear old daddy! Is n't it a beautiful world, Mr. Laird?" The girl turned to Joe suddenly and he could hardly keep from clasping her swaying figure in his arms there in the broad light of day and before the watching figures on the porch.

"Daddy! Daddy!" rang through the air, and Joe turned to see the twinkling legs of the twins running at full speed toward him.

Vivian turned, too, and smiled curiously, watching the swift approach. When Bob and Ella saw the pretty lady with their father they became for the moment tongue-tied, though their legs lost none of their celerity. Vivian observed the two, who had equally short hair and were dressed just alike in rompers from which their bare legs protruded.

"How do you do, children?" she said. "How is anybody going to know which is Jack and which is Jill?"

"We're not Jack and Jill," said Bob seriously, as they came to a standstill, "but I'm the boy."

"But we're suf-sufferers," explained Ella, smarting under the implication of inferiority.

The elders laughed. "So am I," said Vivian, stooping before Ella, who prepared stoically to be kissed, but was n't.

"Daddy, daddy," said Bob, setting aside these unimportant matters, "the dam broke."

"Why did n't you dam it again?" asked Joe, giving Vivian the smile she especially — oh, quite especially — liked.

"We can't without you," said Ella, turning upon Vivian a significant stare which suggested effacement.

"Oh, well, we have company now. Mr. Breed is on the piazza with grandmother. We are going to have tea out in front of the hotel, so you be good fellows and run away."

"There's a boy down there that's taken my shovel," said Bob, growing red at the memory of outrage. "He says he can do us both — do us both up."

"I kicked him," said Ella reminiscently, "but he kicked worse."

"It's a darned shame," replied Joe, laughing, "but I can't attend to it now."

"I can," said Vivian. "You go and see daddy and I'll be back soon."

She set off, with a child on either side of her, and Joe, looking after them a moment, turned and went on toward the cottage.

Mr. Breed came down to meet him. "Vivian can't go to play in the sand," he said. "Does n't she know we have to start home?"

"She has gone in the rôle of Portia to try a case and rescue Bob's shovel. She has been telling me great news of Ferdy."

"Yes, by Jove, the boy is getting up. Mrs. Chetwyn

does n't push him, either. He is welcome to use canes or crutches or anything he wants to. It's the day he does n't want to that we're looking forward to now. I've just been asking your mother if she thinks of staying on here after you go back. She seems pretty firm against it."

"Oh, yes, I'm against it," said May Ca'line. "I'd far rather be with Joe."

"And he's looking mighty fit, too," remarked Mr. Breed, surveying his secretary and his ten days' coat of bronze.

"I feel fit," said Joe heartily. "We return next Monday."

Mr. Breed nodded. "After you come back I'll take Vivian to the sea for a while."

"Not here, of course," remarked Joe. "We've had a great time, but trippers are thicker than lobsters and there is no society act being done here."

"No, this is n't the sort of place, but Vivian begs off from a fashionable spot. She pleads to be put out to grass."

Joe nodded. "I should n't wonder. Of course, there are plenty of servants at Rose Ledge, but I fancy it is no joke to run the place, even with a housekeeper, and the constant house-parties keep a hostess on the *qui vive*."

Mr. Breed looked at the speaker sharply. "What's the matter? Has Vivian complained?"

"Far from it, but she has grown thin."

"I don't notice it."

"No, you see her every day, but I notice it. There's a winter coming, too, you know. It seems to me that idea of putting her out to grass is a good one. She

does n't want to go where she will have to wear half a dozen costumes a day."

Mr. Breed looked off into space, and as he did so the wind brought a sound of shrieks and cries from the beach. Joe looked up, and a sensation of nausea stole over him. People were running and shouting. It brought back one sickening evening.

The chief joy of most picnickers to the beach from the city being to scream at the onslaught of the powerful rollers, the present ebullition might signify hilarity, but the running of all loiterers toward one point gave a sinister suggestion. His children were there and Vivian.

"I'll see what that is," he said briefly, and started off on a run toward the water.

May Ca'line joined Mr. Breed and they followed.

It seems that the bully who had taken away Bob's shovel was a boy of fifteen, who had seen in it a convenient weapon for the flinging of sand over the girls and men of his party, and just as the children had pointed him out and Vivian was advancing to demand the return of the treasure, one of the besieged men, whose smarting eyes failed to see the humorous side of an improvised sandstorm, and who was unable to enforce obedience to a command to "cut it out," seized the culprit by his collar and trousers and threw him into an incoming roller, expecting to see a chastened boy flung up on the beach. But the man's arms were muscular and he had reckoned without the undertow. The boy, crying frantically for help as he emerged, was carried out by the receding wave, and excitement instantly reigned.

The bathing-master was far up the beach, the man who had administered the punishment waded distract-

edly into the water, wringing his hands and calling upon any one who could swim to make the rescue.

Joe Laird as he approached saw the head bob up again far out on a wave, and kicking off his shoes, plunged in.

Vivian caught a woman by the arm. "Can't any one else here swim? Where is the bathing-master?" she demanded.

"Farther up the beach where the rope is. Nobody goes in here. It is n't safe."

Looking wildly about she saw a boy of twelve and rushed up to him. "Five dollars to you if you bring the bathing-master," she said, and he was off like a shot. She turned to meet her father and May Ca'line who had seen Joe's plunge.

"It will be all right," said Mr. Breed reassuringly, but his voice was excited.

Vivian put an arm around May Ca'line, whose lips moved without a sound emerging, but her eyes were calm and bright as they looked across the billows toward the outgoing swimmer.

The children clung to her. "It's the boy that took my shovel," said Bob.

Mr. Breed moved about among the men. "Is n't there another swimmer here?" he asked.

Dull denial and frightened tears met him.

They could see now that Joe had reached the boy, but apparently he did not make any effort to come in.

Vivian turned anguished eyes in the direction of the bathing-beach. "They're both weighed down with their clothes," she said, "and probably the boy is hanging on him and won't let him swim. Have you a bathing-suit, Mrs. Laird? The children will show me where."

She ran swiftly toward the cottage, and Mr. Breed returned. His frowning face betrayed his anxiety and May Ca'line's exalted look amazed him. "Where is Vivian?" he asked.

"Gone for a bathing-suit."

"To go in? Impossible. I can't allow it. Why does n't Joe turn and come this way?"

"He won't come without the boy," said May Ca'line softly.

They saw the breakers submerge him and then saw his head reappear. They could no longer perceive the boy. The minutes seemed hours. Suddenly a light, hurrying footfall passed them at top speed and a cheer broke forth as the girlish figure plunged through a seething, powerful roller.

Mr. Breed started. "She had no right to do that," he said angrily, and strode to the water's edge, pale to the lips. He knew that Vivian was an expert swimmer, but gruesome talk all about him of the undertow at this tide and Joe's apparent inability to cope with it filled him with fear.

He turned to May Ca'line, who stood in the same spot, the wind blowing the tendrils of her hair into a sort of bright halo about her face. He was dumb before its expression as she held the clinging children close.

"Omnipotent!" she said softly.

Vivian took the waves with experienced deliberation and swam steadily. Joe heard her "hello" and watched her progress. He was treading water and striving with the panic-stricken dead weight that clung about him. The spirit which snatched the little shovel was not a heroic one.

"You glorious girl!" said Joe breathlessly when she came near. "I was just going to knock him over the head as a last argument when I caught a glimpse of you."

Meanwhile the small boy in pursuit of five dollars had startled the bathing-master from his rearrangement of some details about the bathhouses and been left far behind by the long legs that started running up the beach. The man was in his bathing-trunks and plunging into the water he soon met Joe and Vivian in their slow progress with their burden. He pulled the boy onto his back, and informing him how to hold on by his shoulders told him that if he choked him he would be thrown off into the sea. He then left the young people and made for the shore.

"Don't try to talk," said Vivian. "I know what you've been through. Do you want to put your hand on my shoulder?"

"Yes, but I don't need to."

"I know how heavy those clothes feel," said the girl as they swam slowly and steadily.

"That was the trouble," breathlessly. "His clothes — and my clothes — and he was such a fool. What a trump you are!"

"Nobody up there could swim," said Vivian. "Don't talk."

They finally reached a sandbar. "Let's wait here a minute," said Vivian. "Get your breath."

They stood gazing into one another's eyes.

"I never before realized — what a very handsome man — that bathing-master is," said Joe. "I wonder — how he happened to come to life."

"I sent for him."

"You thought of everything."

"Yes, I have human intelligence" — the girl laughed. "Everybody seemed paralyzed."

"Do you know how I thank you?" For a moment only Joe's hands rested on her shoulders, but his eyes clung longer.

"Oh, it was great!" she answered. "I enjoyed it. Now, then, shall it be homeward bound?" She slid into the deep water, her laughing face toward him. "I'm afraid we shall be late to tea."

Their people came running to meet them. The bathing-master was working over the cause of all the excitement who had swallowed enough sea-water to quench all desire for beach parties for some time to come.

The small boy for whom a fortune was awaiting approached Vivian with large eyes.

"Here, daddy, give this boy five dollars, please," She laughed down at the child. Her heart was singing. That minute while they rested on the sandbar had told her much. "He has earned a hundred, but we won't give it to him," she added, and fell all wet and glistening into May Ca'line's outstretched arms.

"My darling little girl. My darling little girl," repeated the mother, and Vivian laughed as she gave her a damp embrace.

"You need to reach up to hug the darling little girl, don't you?" she said gayly.

"Now, no more pranks," said Adam Breed crisply. He was still very white. "Up to the house with you, and if there is any hot tea in this place, let's have it."

## CHAPTER XXV

AUGUST

HETTY WOODWARD entered Martha Berry's kitchen one morning without knocking. Mrs. Berry turned from the sink and faced her. When Hetty wore the present expression and carried her head in front of her body, Martha always assumed an ultra-calmness of demeanor.

"I declare, I forgot to knock," said Hetty. "You was n't to the store last night or I'd have showed you the letter then. You know I was tellin' you how queer I thought it was that May Ca'line never answered my letter about her house bein' bought and made over. Well, you won't wonder when I show you this."

Hetty held forth a newspaper clipping and Mrs. Berry, who had n't yet spoken, pulled her spectacles down from the top of her head and, accepting the paper, read the headlines: —

### FATAL AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT

---

Young Wife on Way to keep Appointment with her Husband at The  
Three Crows Victim of Collision

Then followed the tale, which Martha read, shaking her head and biting her lip with all the pitying amazement Hetty had hoped for.

"So now, you see, vampire or not, she's gone," said Hetty.

"'T was you called her that, not me," retorted

Martha with spirit. She was not going to allow Hetty Woodward to implant pangs of conscience at this juncture for unjust suspicion.

"Well, here's what May Ca'line says," returned Hetty, opening her letter and reading aloud:—

DEAR HETTY:—

When you read enclosed clipping you will see that we have been through deep waters and you will forgive my not responding to your letter with its surprising news about the old home.

Joe and the children and I went to the beach for a couple of weeks after the accident and came back only a few days ago. We are adjusting ourselves to the new circumstances as well as we can, and I am very thankful that I can be with him and help him in the dreadful shock he has had to bear.

Perhaps you and Martha remember a Mr. Breed that was in Leacock one season before Martha and I were married. It was a great surprise to me to learn that the very same man is now Joe's employer. He has risen to be an important person in the business world and has been very kind to us in our dreadful experience. You will forgive me if I don't write often now that I have so many new cares. I am very fond of the children and accept the responsibilities as pleasant ones. Always with love to you and Martha.

As ever,

MAY CAROLINE LAIRD.

"There, what do you think o' that?" demanded Hetty. "If it ain't stranger 'n fiction for her boy to be in *his* office, I'd like to know."

"It certainly is," returned Martha with an interest which encouraged Hetty to further disclosures.

They were both sitting down by this time, Hetty rocking as only she could rock, with a risky *abandon* which always strained Mrs. Berry's courtesy as hostess.

"For pity's sake, sit still, Het," she said now, her nerves somewhat keyed up by all she had heard.

Miss Woodward obeyed. "Well, last night I saw Mr. Frothin'ham. I suppose you know the house is about finished."

Mrs. Berry nodded.

"And he's givin' out his invitations for the dance he's promised the girls and boys. It's goin' to be grand. He's taken the hall and goin' to have it all decked with greens and he's goin' to have the band —"

"The greenest thing of all," remarked Mrs. Berry.

"Yes, he says he hopes they know how to play dance music. Well, of course you know all about his plans, but anyway he come into the store last night to invite me and I thought 't was a real good chance, and I says to him, 'You're from the city, do you happen to know Mr. Adam Breed of the X. & Y. Railroad?' Well, you never saw such a queer look as he gave me. 'What's this?' he says. 'I knew you had a wonderful nose, but can it be that you smell a mouse?' says he. Now, I want to know if you ever heard such a queer answer in your life?" Hetty rocked again as she made the demand. Human nature demanded action.

"No, I never did," answered Martha Berry bluntly. "What in the world did he mean by that?"

"Well, I did n't know but it was some kind o' city slang that meant somethin' different from bein' suspicious; so I just looked sort o' careless and I said, 'That ain't answerin' me, Mr. Frothin'ham.'

"That's so" says he. "Yes, I do know Mr. Breed."

"He lived here once on a time," says I, "and we're interested in him. He's got one of our Leacock boys in his store."

"You're tellin' me news," says he; "I never knew that."

“‘I s’pose he’s married,’ says I, kind o’ careless.

“‘Oh, yes, he has two children; his daughter is the most charming girl I’ve ever known.’ Right then he blushed, Martha. I saw it as plain as I see you. Would n’t it be the greatest thing in life if that home is bein’ fixed up for Adam Breed’s daughter?”

Mrs. Berry’s eyes were bright. “I always told you he was goin’ to be married,” she returned. “What earthly sense would there be otherwise in doin’ what he has done? *That’s the mouse!*” she exclaimed with such sudden loudness that Hetty jumped. “Why, of course it is. When you asked about Mr. Breed, you see, he thought you’d heard of his engagement to the daughter.”

The rockers stopped now. There are states of mind which induce paralysis.

“It takes you, Martha,” said Hetty, looking off, plunged in deep, admiring thought. “It seems as if you must be right,” — she looked back at her friend, — “but it was n’t his engagement I was thinkin’ about at all. I was after somethin’ else, quite different.” She paused.

“Well, speak up. You usually get what you’re after.”

“I did,” returned Hetty triumphantly. “Says I, still sort o’ careless, ‘Leacock folks would be glad if Mr. Breed would bring his wife and daughter out to see us some day,’ and Mr. Frothin’ham answered up, quick as a wink, ‘Perhaps he’ll bring his daughter,’ he says, ‘but his wife died many years ago.’”

“There,” returned Mrs. Berry, “you see he says you’ll see the daughter. He knows that sure as gospel you will.”

“All very well,” returned Miss Woodward, “but

you've missed the point, Martha. Mr. Breed's a widower." She rocked with a satisfied *abandon* which caused her hostess to grab the arm of the chair.

"You'll go over on your head, Het. — What is it to you if Mr. Breed is a widower?"

"Nothin'. I never knew you so dumb, Martha."

Mrs. Berry gazed with cool and cautious eyes in which understanding slowly awoke. "Are you talkin' about May Ca'line?"

Hetty nodded and gave her gum a very strenuous experience.

"Oh, pshaw, she's got a family to bring up now," said Mrs. Berry, "and he's a big, rich man. Probably they're as far apart as the poles. Think of all the fashionable women he knows. He'd never look at May Ca'line."

"He would in a movie," said Hetty.

"Oh, you'd better come down to earth," laughed Martha. "I've got a treat for you, though. Mr. Frothin'ham's goin' to take you and I through the house tomorrow. He says he hates to give offense, but he's explainin' to folks that since the furnishin's have come he can't invite 'em in. He tells 'em the mistress will soon take possession, and then they must all call on her and they can see everything, but he's goin' to take you and I through on the sly, 'cause we was his first friends and he can rely on us to keep our mouths shut."

"Oh, that's grand," said Hetty. "I do hope Adam Breed's daughter ain't goin' to be the stuck-up kind."

"If she was do you suppose he'd bring her out here?" returned Martha; and the question did seem unanswerable.

One day May Ca'line and the twins drove out in state to Rose Ledge and had a happy visit. With them were Mrs. Chetwyn and Ferdy. The boy still moved slowly, but he had discarded his crutches, and his eyes shone with hope.

It was a wonder day to May Ca'line and the children. Luncheon, the lovely ride on the lake, tea on the lawn, and the manifold interests of the charming house absorbed them until time to return.

Vivian was an alert and charming hostess and May Ca'line's eyes followed her as the most attractive feature of the place.

Adam Breed came out from town in time to have tea with the guests before the departure homeward. Some weeks had elapsed since the return from Breakers Beach and August was well started, yet he was still at his office every day.

May Ca'line had opportunity to speak to him alone before she entered the motor to return. Mrs. Chetwyn and Ferdy were to stay on at Rose Ledge for a few days.

"Your daughter is tired, Adam," she said.

Mr. Breed cast a glance around at the girl who was laughing at some sally of Ella's.

"This is a wonderfully wholesome place," he protested.

"Yes, for guests," she replied. "Your daughter is tired," she repeated.

"I've been thinking of putting her out to grass," he said, "but it seems hard for me to get away farther than here. If I choose the place will you take her under your wing?"

"Would she be happy under it?"

"Oh, yes, she's strong for you."

"But I have the children."

"That's why one more won't make much difference."

"Is it right for me to leave Joe?"

"Joe is going to California."

"What!"

"Yes, I'm sending him next week."

The mother looked rather aghast.

"It will do him good, May. That is one reason I'm sending him. Remember, as you once said to me of Ferdy, 'I love him, too.'"

May Ca'line lifted her grateful glance to the quizzical eyes.

"You are the little mascot of us all," said Adam Breed.

"You make me very happy saying so."

"Then, do you put yourself in my hands, and so take care of my little girl — let her be a vegetable for a while?"

"If Joe says I may," she answered, smiling.

"I don't know that you need to consult Joe — going across the continent to leave you. You're free, white, and twenty-one."

"You talk it over with Joe," she said.

"I have."

"Oh, that's all right, then. Come, children. We must leave Paradise and go home to our own dear little sand-pile. Good-bye, Miss Vivian. You have given us a wonderful day, never to be forgotten."

"Then don't call me 'Miss,' Mrs. Laird." Vivian took the little woman's hands and kissed her. "Remember what you stand for to us." She motioned with her head to where her brother stood erect by the roadside.

"You all make me too happy," said May Ca'line, and

her eyes were bright as she gathered her brood into the motor.

When they had gone Adam Breed turned to his daughter and examined her critically.

"Well," she said, "have I changed very much since this morning?"

"I'm told by various and sundry members of the Laird family that you need a rest. I have pleaded that Rose Ledge is a rather fresh and invigorating place, but all to no avail. Joe says you're thin and I work you too hard."

"Did you discharge him for that?" asked Vivian gayly.

"Yes. He's going to California to seek his fortune."

The effect of the jocose reply surprised Adam Breed. His daughter's eyes flashed at him and she seized his arm. "You don't mean that, of course," she said quietly.

"Yes, he is going to California."

"But — on business for you?"

"Well," returned Adam Breed dryly, "in the hope of living a little longer I will admit that he is."

Vivian dropped her grasp on his arm, and all vivacity having disappeared from her face her father observed its tired expression.

"Here, youngster, come and sit down," he said, and drew her toward a cushioned seat on the broad veranda. "You tell me you don't yearn for fashion at the shore."

"Oh, daddy, do let me off. I love it here. Let me stay without any guests."

"No; I don't think Joe Laird would consider that that freed you sufficiently." As he said this Adam Breed watched its effect and saw the pale face color, up to the bright-hued hair.

They were silent for a space, then he spoke again. "Joe is a very obscure fellow, Vivian. Not one of the set you have enjoyed and played with the last year ever heard of him."

"He won't be obscure after you have placed him where he ought to be," she answered, playing with the tassel of her pillow. "You once told me you wanted to give him opportunities."

"Yes, but I don't know that I want to give him the biggest opportunity of all." Adam Breed said it slowly, regarding his daughter, who continued to regard the tassel. "Perhaps he may stay in California," he added. "Perhaps I'll exile him."

The girl glanced around at the speaker with a suggestion of mischief in her eyes.

"And offer me Willis Frothingham on a silver salver, I suppose," she replied.

"Frothingham is a rising man, Vivian. Very, very promising, and he knows all your friends."

"He's lots of fun," returned the girl. "I like him."

"So do I. I told him so; and that brings me to something I want to tell you. Mrs. Laird has also noticed that I have been a cruel parent and allowed my child to work and play too hard. You said the other day you wanted to be put out to grass. How would you like her for a chaperon?"

Vivian looked around, smiling with wide eyes. "I'd love it; the little chérie, but it would be a case of my chaperoning her."

"Not in the tall grass. She is more at home there than you are. Now here's my story. Your father is going to confess to a sentimental freak." He paused and his daughter again looked around at him.

"I'm so interested," she said, regarding him curiously.

"I've never forgotten the little village of Leacock where I began my career."

"Yes, and where you admired the pretty girl, but she was engaged to some one else."

"Exactly. By — a — a combination of — of circumstances, her son came one day to be my secretary. Years later he asked for leave of absence to go and bring his mother to town to live with him. When he returned he looked rather ghastly. I guessed that he had found a pathetic state of things. I knew he had plenty of other troubles of his own, but I inquired a bit about the mother and found that it had been a wrench for her to give up her old home. An idea flashed into my mind. I had always had somewhat of a hankering to own a bit of Leacock ground. Why not buy her place? I found a mortgage had been foreclosed on it and that was why she had to come to Joe. I chose Frothingham for my agent —"

"And it's your place, then, that he wrote me of!" exclaimed Vivian. "The Rube place."

"Precisely. It is now in shape. The Lairds know nothing about it and it was my idea to give them a surprise. To tell the truth, at the time I bought it I was thinking it would be a good place to stow Joe's family part of the year."

"Daddy, you've given a lot of thought to him," said Vivian gratefully.

Mr. Breed nodded.

"Now that circumstances have totally changed, I still think it will be a welcome resort for his mother and the children in summer, and I'm telling you all this because I'm planning to take them out there next

week, and I wondered if you would n't like to go too. If your desire is to creep into a hole and pull it in after you, Leacock will fill the bill."

"I do want to. It will be exactly right!" returned Vivian enthusiastically.

"Then mum's the word. I want to surprise them, remember."

"Surprise whom?" asked Vivian demurely.

"Oh, yes, indeed, Joe's going too — unless you object."

"I think he ought to go."

"Yes. Let him see his native heath before he starts West. But none of them will know our destination, remember. Later, perhaps, Ferdy will come out there. Hear him now, laughing with Mrs. Chetwyn."

The twins had much to tell their father that night. There were swans at Rose Ledge — they had fed them. There were goldfish swimming about in the basin of a fountain. There was a big collie dog who had played tag with them on the lawn. So they went on describing joy upon joy, and after they had gone to sleep Joe sighed a bit over it as he sat with his mother on the piazza.

"After all, that is the best thing a fortune brings a man — room for the growing generation to stretch their legs," he said. "Poor kiddies, back to a yard a little bigger than a tablecloth." But it was a cheerful groan, after all, that the speaker gave and he looked now approvingly at the fresh little gown of violet and white which his mother wore.

One day after their return from the seashore he had requested her to destroy or give away every article of wearing apparel she had brought from Leacock.

"I don't want to see again one of the dresses you have worn," he said.

"But the money it will cost, Joe!" she protested.

"My salary has been increased. I can buy you all the dresses you need. Go back to that store and find the young woman we dealt with and buy everything you want."

May Ca'line gasped at such *abandon*, but she obeyed to a degree, and to-night her boy thought she looked very charming.

"When are you going to tell me your great news?" she asked.

"I see you know it," he returned, smiling.

"I think I have a right to cry about it a little," she said. "It will be just for a short time, won't it, dear?"

"I don't know. The work I am to do out there amounts to a big business rise for me."

"I don't see why California should swallow both my children," said May Ca'line, suspicious moisture on her lashes.

"I'm glad to go, mother. I don't like to leave you," said Joe quietly, "but I have a cowardly longing to run away somewhere, run away from Vivian Breed. Her father is very ambitious for her. She has a crowd of suitors. Another winter is sure to see her married. I'd — I'd rather be away."

"Oh, dear me," said May Ca'line dolefully. "How troublesome girls are. I thought we were so happy, Joe."

"We are, you mite, but I'm a terrible fool about that girl. It will give me some sense and balance to be across the continent from her. I want to know that there is no possibility of seeing her."

"Then you can get acquainted again with your sister, too," said May Ca'line. "That will be some comfort to me. Well, well," she added thoughtfully, "is it so serious? I've been asked to chaperon Miss Breed the rest of the summer. I see now that I could never chaperon you both. What is this plan of Mr. Breed's? Something about our going into the country."

Joe leaned forward with eager interest.

"Is *she* to be in it? I did n't know that. Mr. Breed told me he had some plan for you and the children during my absence and asked me to leave it to him, and not to ask questions."

"I told him his daughter looked tired," returned May Ca'line, "and I think the idea popped into his head that minute. I don't understand why he should give us a surprise party. Do you?"

"Why, it's evidently his kindness. He felt that two weeks at the shore was n't enough and that this place was rather cooped up for August. I told him we should be glad to accept his choice of a place if he would remember to go light enough on my pocket-book. He answered that the place he had in mind would be rent free, and I told him that was cheap enough. I suppose it is property of his own. Of course, I shall go, too, and see you settled, and now Vivian is to be there —" Joe looked off into space. "Well, it will be one last draught before going into the desert."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated May Ca'line, bridling. "Are n't you as good as any man?"

"Oh, yes, perhaps better; but not so rich."

"Rich!" repeated May Ca'line scornfully. "It is possible," she added, "that she will have something to say about this. I just wonder if she would have

plunged into that tumbling water to aid anybody and everybody."

"Yes, she would," declared Joe decidedly. "It is exactly what she would have done."

"Well," returned his mother, "whether you are right or wrong about that, I am resigned now to your going to California."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A HOUSEWARMING

THE 10th of August dawned like any other day in Leacock. The village lay in a reaction from Willis Frothingham's dance, but was still talking about it. Everybody knew that he was sleeping at the Laird place now to guard its finished loveliness; and everybody began to wonder what day he would leave for his wedding.

Hetty, as postmistress, had a wonderment of her own which she was not slow to put up against Martha's complacent certainty as to Mr. Frothingham's intentions. Why, if he came to Leacock on the eve of marrying, had there not come to him constant letters in a woman's handwriting — always the same? Letters he did receive; nearly all forwarded letters, and sometimes in a woman's hand, but nothing regular, and seldom two alike.

Simon Berry had received a generous order to stock the new home with staple groceries and canned goods and had ordered from town a list of delicacies prescribed by Willis Frothingham.

"What would May Ca'line say to such richness?" replied Martha Berry to her husband's exultant comment. "There she is saddled with two children to take care of and with the responsibility o' tryin' to save from her son's small salary, while all this is goin' on in her old home!"

Martha had not said so to Hetty, but she felt there

was nothing in the letter the postmistress had read to her to disprove any of her suspicions concerning the nature of the daughter-in-law.

"I'll bet," she soliloquized, "that May Ca'line's happier now even with all her work and care."

That 10th of August, Hetty Woodward was wont to say afterward, her good angel was certainly with her. She did n't know why she sauntered after supper up to the Laird place, but she did so, and while she was lingering, looking at the well-kept grounds, the comfortable seats under the elm trees, the screened porches and the trim sward, the spick-and-span cleanliness of new paint and climbing vines, two handsome motor-cars came slowly up the street and paused before the house.

Hetty backed away to the shelter of a large tree at a little distance. Perhaps the wedding was to occur here! She had never thought of that.

Adam Breed had arranged the parties in the motors to suit himself. May Ca'line, Joe, and Vivian drove with him. In the other car were Nora and the children, with various suitcases, thermos bottles, and hampers of luncheon, chiefly fruit. Mr. Breed had previously seen to expressing the women's trunks, and Joe would have been vastly amused and interested by the revelation of a novel side of his employer if he had not been so engrossed in this holiday with that employer's daughter.

A hundred thrifty questions had occurred to May Ca'line on leaving home. Ever since Gladys left them she had been installed, in spite of all her opposition, in the one roomy chamber of the house, and Joe had moved into the hall bedroom. It seemed strange now

to turn the key on all the arrangements she had made for the family comfort, leave the little house to bake alone under the August sun, a prey perhaps to invasion, with the most indefinite idea as to when she should see it again. But on the morning of the start, as the glistening motors came up the street and they all embarked and rolled away gayly into some delightful unknown, it was not in May Ca'line's nature to dwell on any carking care whatever.

The twins were armed with pails and shovels as symbols of life's highest joys, and Nora was in a state of excited rapture over the excursion, modified only by her awe of the chauffeur.

The party had talked and laughed and eaten and joked until they reached the village which adjoined Leacock. Here the Lairds began to recognize their surroundings.

"Do you know where we're going?" asked Joe of Vivian.

"Daddy, may I admit that I know where we're going?" she asked.

"To Arcadia, of course. We're all aware of that," he returned.

The cars sped on. Every mile they passed verified further the suspicion growing in the minds of the guests.

"Adam," said May Ca'line faintly, "are you taking us —" Her laughter had fled and her eyes were wide and wondering. What was there in Leacock that could provide a resting-place for Adam Breed's daughter?

She reached out her hand for Joe's and he clasped and held it.

The host began to have misgivings. "Backward, turn backward, O Time, in thy flight," he said, bravely

ignoring the signs of apprehension. "It ought to make us young again to see this place, May."

Her lips moved to form assent and she tried to look interested, but the slow-moving months of humiliation and want were too vividly connected with every landmark they were now passing.

Joe tried to fill in the breach. "If any of the folks see us as we go through Leacock, they will report that Mrs. Laird made her fortune in the city and came back like a queen," he said, and his eyes bade his mother brace up.

Their motor was the one in front and it was suddenly signaled and stopped. Willis Frothingham jumped on the running-board. "Room for one more?" he asked, and was gayly welcomed in and introductions followed. He gave directions to the chauffeur and then bestowed all his attention and conversation on Vivian.

"Don't tell me you're going to stay here!" he said, aghast, "and me just about to make my escape and spread my wings for Rose Ledge."

"Indeed, I am," returned Vivian. "You seem to be looking at a girl, but you're wrong. It's a vegetable. I've come here to vegetate."

"You have made an unerring choice of locality," declared the young man with such openly admiring eyes and assurance of manner that Joe accepted him at once as the destroyer of his peace.

"Frothingham," repeated May Ca'line to herself; "the man who bought my house." She had released her son's hand and now prepared herself for what might be coming.

The motors moved slowly up the familiar street, and Hetty Woodward, seeing their approach, backed away, as has been said, to the shelter of a great tree.

As the cars stopped, May Ca'line gazed with fascinated eyes at the transformation before her. Her thoughts were in a whirl. Joe's exclamations of admiration, damped though they were by the green-eyed monster, were spontaneously hearty and amazed.

The chauffeurs carried suitcases and hampers up to the piazza. May Ca'line continued to gaze mutely. Could this be the spot where she had sobbed in Joe's arms that evening in June, poverty-stricken and shrinking from the future?

Willis Frothingham spoke.

"Well, I'll give the men something to eat and see you this evening, Mr. Breed."

"Come back to supper in half an hour," was the reply.

"All right. Thank you, I will." He jumped into the forward car and both motors rolled away leaving their human freight upon the walk.

Hetty saw a stately man with a gray mustache, a lovely young girl, and Joe Laird, his children, and a maid, but her eyes were glued to May Ca'line, dressed in approved city garb, and looking, as she afterward averred, "like a girl again."

They all stood still on the walk, regarding the lovely little homestead. Adam Breed's eyes gazed approvingly.

"A good place to go to grass, Vivian?"

"It is perfectly sweet," she answered heartily.

"Joe, I hope your mother will pardon the liberties I have taken with her old home." As he spoke, Mr. Breed turned half-apprehensively toward May Ca'line and rejoiced to see her face grow radiant as she scanned the scene before her.

"It is as if the poor little house had died and gone to Heaven," she said slowly. "Why should n't I be glad? It is like my new life."

"Bless you," said Adam Breed. He turned to his secretary. "Then, Joe, I want you to accept this place as a parting gift from me. It is right that the house where you were born should belong to you."

The young fellow turned quickly to his friend, incapable of speech, a lump in his throat. The two clasped hands.

"Let's go in," said Adam Breed, "and look it over before the sun sets."

The twins, held close by Nora, were now released and pranced away gayly over the velvety turf, the day's energy stowed in their little legs finding a grand outlet.

Hetty Woodward came out from behind the tree and pinched herself. No, it was not a dream. She had seen Adam Breed and his daughter and had heard the presentation speech which solved all doubts about the house. Above all, she had seen May Ca'line; pretty, prosperous, stylish May Ca'line! Would her legs serve her to go as far as Martha Berry's? That was the only question. She hobbled along, quaking with excitement. May Ca'line was mistress of all the beauty and completeness she and Martha had witnessed on their late tour through the house. May Ca'line would be living here, perhaps permanently. Mr. Frothingham was only an agent, not an owner. Adam Breed would never have spent all those thousands of dollars to give that place to Joe Laird if he were not still in love with May Ca'line. Life in Leacock was getting to be too overwhelmingly exciting. She would have to go to a sanitarium and take a rest cure if this sort of thing went on.

Arrived at Martha Berry's she beheld her giving supper to the two chauffeurs and she lingered, sitting on the kitchen doorstep until her friend should be at liberty.

To her Simon Berry appeared.

"I dunno," he grumbled, "as I care 'bout keepin' a tavern. Frothin'ham said two friends would be here to a late supper and Martha's just soft enough to do anything he wants."

"Where are they goin' to sleep?" asked Hetty in deep tones. Even had the doorstep possessed rockers she could not have rocked.

"To the hotel. Wonder who they be. They look like military men."

"They're chiffoniers," said Hetty from the depths of her ponderous knowledge.

"Shofers, do ye mean? Who's got two shofers in this part o' the woods?"

"Visitors," replied Hetty laconically. Simon might probe in vain. There was going to be no anti-climax to the burst of information shortly to descend upon Martha Berry. "Did n't Mr. Frothin'ham tell you who they were?" she asked cautiously.

"No. He landed 'em on us, brought 'em over here from the hotel, sayin' he had pity on 'em, then he went up to his room and washed and went out ag'in. What's up? Has some of his swell friends come to town?"

Hetty fanned herself with a newspaper, turned her head aside, and gave a smile as subtly portentous as any ever seen on the screen.

"They have," she answered in a hollow tone.

Meanwhile, at the end of the tour through the new house, in a room upstairs done in delicate shades of

violet, May Ca'line and her boy stood clasped in one another's arms.

"It does n't seem real, Joe."

He gave a short laugh. "According to your philosophy the more beautiful it is, the more real."

"To think that this lovely place is yours, dear!"

"Yes, it's a regular fairy godfather performance, I admit; and the Governor is enjoying it. How he is enjoying it!"

"Think of my ever owning a cheval glass and a *chaise longue*, Joe!"

"Good enough *for* you, honey. Don't you cry now and spoil your eyes. Supper in ten minutes. Think of smuggling the Rose Ledge cook here and having everything ready. Money surely is the magician's wand."

"Yes, with a kind heart behind it. I'm sorry for your sake, dear, that Mr. Frothingham will be here to supper."

"He deserves a bonbon," said Joe. "If you could imagine what it has been to him to spend a summer in Leacock!"

"I'm sure he was well paid," said May Ca'line, instinctively inimical to the man who had looked so devouringly at her son's love.

"You may be sure he was well paid. He's an expensive luxury," — Joe heaved a quick sigh, — "and I'm sure he is going to be paid still better. He's the coming man. I've often heard it hinted. He's the man that makes California my Mecca."

"Oh, I don't believe it, but anyway I am going to be in a position to see, and I'll keep you posted."

"No, thank you. I object to being killed by inches. Don't detail symptoms, please."

"You must have your picture taken before you go, Joe." May Ca'line clung to him. "I insist upon that."

"Well, we can't have it taken till after supper, so hurry, honey. We're due downstairs."

"Go out and see the children a minute. They're so sweet in the nursery."

Joe proceeded to the back of the house, where, above what had once been a summer kitchen and shed, there were two finished rooms, one of which had been dedicated to the twins. The frieze and rugs represented babies, birds, rabbits, and lambs, and there at a little white table sat the children, ministered to by Nora, and eating their supper. Daddy was the crowning touch. They both talked to him at once of the little beds on their screened sleeping-porch, where they would see the stars to-night, and in the morning hear the birds.

"Birds don't sing much in August," said Joe. "The brook will have to do the singing."

"The brook is the best thing here," announced Ella.

"I don't want to ever go home," declared Bob.

Joe bowed his head over them. His children at last had room to gambol on the green to their hearts' content. They might fall into the brook daily. Nora was on hand to take care of them.

Vivian, retaining one of the cars, would be here for some time at least. His mother would have ease, comfort, luxury. Surely he should quell his selfish longings and be content in the well-being of his loved ones. His mother was the center and cause of it all, of course. He wondered if she really believed that Adam Breed, the hard man, had gone to this extraordinary trouble and expense in order to bestow such a gift upon his secretary.

Joe had received many proofs that the fatal accident at the Three Crows had broken down a barrier which had withstood the years; that for him his employer would never again be a hard man, unless, indeed, in time to come, Vivian remaining free, he should lift his eyes to her. There, he believed, Adam Breed would make a stand. There was an invisible line enclosing the select. Willis Frothingham and a dozen other of Vivian's suitors dwelt within the pale. He himself was emphatically outside. True, Vivian seemed to show frankly her enjoyment of his society, but probably that light in her lovely eyes indicated compassion.

There had been a romance in Adam Breed's youth of which his mother had been the heroine. He wondered what thoughts she harbored as she looked about on the luxuries and comforts which had entailed so much expenditure of thought and money.

"Giving it to me!" thought Joe with a smile and a shrug. He admired the childlike pleasure and unconsciousness his mother had displayed during the viewing of the house. Considering that the place belonged to Joe, it was rather curious that Mr. Breed's eyes had consulted only May Ca'line's approval throughout.

While waiting for supper Vivian stood with her father on a side porch. She put her arm through his. "What a grand success," she said.

"Yes, Frothingham is very capable," he replied.

She squeezed his arm. "I never realized till to-night how much you loved that obscure Joe."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Joe's a fine chap."

"When you give him a piece of property like this," continued Vivian, "it shows how constantly you have him in your thought."

Adam Breed glanced quickly down at his daughter, then back at the crimson west.

"I told you it was a sentimental freak of mine. I told you I wanted to own a bit of Leacock."

"You'll have to get another, then, won't you?"

"Why, pray?"

"You have given this away."

Once more her father glanced down and up again quickly. "I don't believe there is anything else here that would interest me."

"Sure?" Vivian drawled the question, squeezing his arm and laughing. "Oh, I'm not jealous."

"Why should you be?"

"You gave the place to Joe instead of to me, did n't you? Was it your idea that it would be all in the family?"

"Tut, tut, Vivian. No, no. None of that now. I thought — I thought that it might as well be in Joe's name as —"

"As in hers?"

"As in mine. I designed it for his benefit in the first place."

"You treat him just like a son, don't you?"

"None of that, I tell you, Vivian. Now, Frothingham is coming over to supper. He has done a fine piece of work here and I want you to devote yourself to him. He has to go back to town to-morrow and he is mighty disappointed that you are n't to be there."

"No, indeed, I'm going to be here taking care of Joe's property."

Her father looked at her for a moment in silence. "You don't want two children to bring up," he said at last.

His daughter lifted her eyes to him demurely. "Would it interfere with your plans if Chérie brought them up?" she asked.

He laughed and the crimson sunset was reflected in his face. "You're a saucy jade," he remarked quietly. "I don't believe you understand entirely, my child."

"If I did n't, dearest," she returned gently, "it would be your paternal duty to place me in an asylum. And let me assure you that I realize there is something very fine about a woman who can behave as she has this afternoon. In the first place, she received a shock, but she knew you had intended to give pleasure and she controlled herself. Then, if she had really believed you did all this for Joe, she could not have carried herself differently. I admired her very much."

Here May Ca'line appeared from the house. "I see Mr. Frothingham coming," she said, "and supper is ready. It's the most fairy-like looking supper."

"Heavens, I hope not," said Adam Breed; "I've a gigantic appetite."

"I keep pinching myself," said May Ca'line, "but nothing disappears and I go right on dreaming. It's great fun."

Father and daughter regarded her. She wore a black net dress with open square neck and her bright curls glinted in the last sun-rays.

"I don't think you will have to say, 'Little table, disappear,' when we finish," said Vivian, "with three men on your hands. Is Mr. Laird one of the hungry sort?" she added with polite interest.

"Oh, my child, you will have to drop that 'Mister' while you're under my wing. I'll try not to bore you — try not to have my conversation too much Joe, Joe, Joe."

“Don’t mind me, Chérie,” returned the girl, putting an arm around her as they moved toward the house, “I’ll stoop down and get under your wing occasionally, but mostly, I think, I shall be using my own wings. Are n’t we going to have a great time?”

Adam Breed followed them frowning, smoothing his mustache, and smiling into it.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### MAY CA'LINE ENTERTAINS

THE news spread through the village like wildfire. Hetty Woodward; at her post the next morning, was a bureau of information and carried herself with an air of solemn importance.

To the eager questioning with which she was besieged all day she told her story with increasing embellishment, ending always with the declaration, "With my own ears. I heard it with my own ears," as if she might possibly have borrowed another pair for the occasion.

May Ca'line, remembering that Martha Berry had given Willis Frothingham a home during his labors, sent a message by him to her old friend.

"I can tell you this is all very excitin' to us, Mr. Frothin'ham," Martha answered. "There is n't anybody could come back to this town more welcome than Mrs. Laird."

"And when I return," said Frothingham, "I hope you will welcome me, too, Mrs. Berry. I expect to be back once or twice — there is no telling. I have the Leacock habit, you see."

Martha assured him that his room would be always waiting. "I hate to see your trunk go out. I do, really," she said warmly. "You've made this town do the most guessin' it ever did in its life. What *I* thought was you was goin' to be married." She laughed and reddened.

"Well, I hope you've guessed right," he replied. "If I'm not, it won't be my fault. I'm going over to the

store now to say good-bye to Mr. Berry. You've both been awfully good to me and I'm going to consider my little room upstairs one of my homes. Good-bye."

Frothingham thereupon embarrassed Martha extremely by kissing the hand she gave him, and departed.

She sighed. "We're goin' to miss him somethin' awful," she thought regretfully. "He did praise my greens so much."

He breezed into the post-office, which was full of eager villagers, Simon Berry among them, and was greeted with smiles and almost tears. "We hate to lose you, Mr. Frothin'ham," was heard on every side.

"But see what you get in exchange," he returned, — "a house full of nice people."

Miss Woodward regretted to admit publicly that there was any inmost plan of the family of which she was ignorant, but curiosity prevailed.

"Is Mr. Breed goin' to stay long?" she inquired.

"No; he returns with me this morning. Doubtless he will be back, off and on, to see how Leacock treats his daughter."

"I s'pose, however, the owner will be with us the rest o' the summer," said Hetty with an air of repressing a yawn in the midst of the question.

"I just told you he is going back with me," returned Frothingham. "You're excited, my dear Hetty."

The postmistress looked around triumphantly on the assembled crowd. "Is Joe Laird goin' back with you?" she asked with a toss of the head.

"You appear to know the gentleman."

"Know him! I've chased him off my cherry trees more times than I can mention."

"H'm." Willis Frothingham looked thoughtful, cer-

tain reminiscences of last evening flitting through his mind. "Does he — does he chase easily?" he asked.

"Does he! He used to have more come-backs than a gnat; but now he's a big man. We have to forget all that. You seem to think, Mr. Frothin'ham," — Hetty gathered her audience with a sweep of the eyes, — "you seem to think Mr. Breed owns that old home."

Willis Frothingham smiled. "I was under that impression."

"A good joke," said Hetty, leaning over the counter and shaking a skinny forefinger at him.

"Sorry I could n't be more frank about the plans," went on the young man, "but he wished the affair to be kept *sub rosa*."

"Well, you had us guessin' a long time, but now you can take your turn," said Hetty. "Don't you really know Mr. Breed has made a present o' that place?"

"To his daughter?" asked Frothingham, with unmistakably sincere interest.

"No-o," returned Hetty, drawing herself up proudly and playing to the gallery, — "to Joseph Laird."

"Is it possible?" Frothingham frowned.

"With these ears," — the postmistress pointed to the organs, which in her case were unusually evident, — "I heard him with my own ears."

The architect stared at her. "Miss Woodward," he said, "ears, too? I knew you had a nose unrivaled in New England, but with those ears added, the detective bureaus would be fighting to secure your services if they knew of you."

"Of course, Mr. Breed had his own reasons," — Hetty's voice rose to a high key and everybody was at liberty to see that she knew those reasons well and in

fact had been consulted, — “but it was a great surprise to Joe. That was plain.”

“Yes, Het told us last night,” put in Simon Berry. “I s’posed you knew it. Joe’s stayin’ on, ain’t he? Pretty well broke up he is, I s’pose. That was an awful thing about his wife. S’pose you knew about it.”

“Yes, I saw it in the papers. I was n’t acquainted with him at the time, but it spoke of his being Mr. Breed’s secretary. I’m sincerely sorry he lost his wife. Dreadful thing.”

“I s’pose he’ll stay here for a time with his motherless babes,” said Hetty.

Frothingham regarded her quizzically. “I don’t see how he has happened not to tell you that he is leaving for California at once. I’ll rebuke him for the omission. There’s the car. I must go, but it is n’t a long farewell. I’m coming back after a while; Mrs. Berry says I may. Good-bye, Hetty, queen of the sleuths.”

He shook hands with Simon Berry, and the post-mistress, and waved his hat to the others. “Good-bye, all. Don’t forget me.” And then he went out to the car, entered, and rolled away toward the Laird place, all eyes following the motor.

That night Hetty looked through all the s’s in the antiquated dictionary to find “Sloth.”

Arrived at the house, Willis Frothingham found Joe Laird romping with his children on the grass. When the twins had been told that they would not see their daddy again for some time, they demanded a number of tossings to last until his return. He was laughing and groaning on the last lap when Adam Breed and the ladies came out from the house and the architect arrived.

Vivian, her conscience not entirely easy concerning the amount of attention she had paid Mr. Frothingham last evening, was very cordial and allowed him to lead her a little apart. He told her what arrangements he had made about her car and she thanked him.

"I'm coming out to see you again pretty soon," he said gravely.

"Don't strain friendship too far," she replied gayly. "We do get a pretty good breeze here, but you have sacrificed yourself to a whole summer of inland life. I think you must need the sea."

"You have n't had it yourself," he returned, still grave.

"No, and the chief need I seemed to have now was to get away from people. Mrs. Laird is going to tether me out in the grass here, untying me only for meals and to do some motoring, and nobody is going to be allowed to speak to me."

"Do you mean you don't want me to come?"

"Indeed, I don't mean that," returned the girl, looking at him with her characteristic frank directness; "I'm only advising you for your own comfort to visit me at Rose Ledge instead, a month or so hence."

"I shall come if you don't forbid me," he answered.

"Be it on your own head, then," she answered brightly.

"Come, Frothingham," called Adam Breed, "all aboard."

May Ca'line was standing with her hand through her tall boy's arm. They had made their adieux upstairs in her room and her eyes were tinged with red. It was fortunate for her that she had had that affectionate interview, for at present she was sharing the common

fate of mothers. Joe heard not one word she was saying because Vivian was standing apart with Frothingham under an elm tree and in a few minutes he would see her no more.

"I shall be coming back one of these days to look you over," said Adam Breed to May Ca'line, "and see how everything goes here."

"Bring Ferdy with you," she answered. "I hope he will soon be able to do a little work with a tutor. I know one of my friends would take such a man to board, and would n't Ferdy be happier here than so much alone at Rose Ledge?"

Adam Breed nodded. "Indeed, he would, probably. But how about Mrs. Chetwyn?"

"There is no space in spirit," replied May Ca'line.

Mr. Breed blinked, then regarded her reddened eyelids. "Then it won't make so much difference if Joe is in California, will it?"

She gave him a flickering smile. "That's taking a mean advantage, Adam. Joe, do you let him tease me?"

"H'm? What?" asked Joe, dragging his thoughts away from the elm tree. Why did Frothingham have to monopolize her at this time? *He* was not going across the continent!

"Frothingham," called Adam Breed again, "we're going."

The two young people heard and approached.

Vivian kissed her father. "Be a good boy," she said. "I don't know how far you can be trusted without Mr. Laird."

She smiled at Joe, and had he known what a different light illumined her eyes from that which had been shining on his rival he would have been comforted. Not

that Joe believed he wanted comfort. What he wanted was a Spartan philosophy. He had even made up his mind what was to be his peroration on leaving this star among girls. He kissed his children and his mother and held out his hand to Vivian.

"I am very glad to be leaving my mother with you, Miss Vivian. I shall hear through her how the simple life agrees with you."

Adam Breed watched the young fellow's face as he spoke. If the latter had any hopes, none appeared in his matter-of-fact manner.

Vivian took a sealed letter from the front of her blouse and handed it to him. "To read on the second day of your trip," she said.

The light that flashed over Joe's face as he received the envelope transformed it.

"Confound the boy," thought Adam Breed. "He's got it, too; and as for her — she's the — the limit."

The three men entered the car and waved their hats as it rolled away. Tears dripped down May Ca'line's cheeks as she watched the receding motor and she pressed her handkerchief to her lips. She turned to Vivian with an April smile. "Anybody who could cry under these circumstances ought to be whipped," she said. She could not explain what a short time it had seemed to her that she had had her boy with no inimical shadow standing between them. Her thoughts ran on in a strain very grateful to Adam Breed. Had he not said that he was sending Joe far away because he loved him? Perhaps he had discerned the state of the boy's heart, and certainly she could see that under all the circumstances it was in the interests of everybody to have him removed from the scene.

"It must be a comfort to you that he is going to see his sister," said Vivian. She had her own comfort. It was the look Joe had given her when she handed him the letter.

"I suppose you know nothing of village life," said May Ca'line, giving her eyes a final pressure. "You are going to be amused by some things here, but I have old friends who will be eager to come to see me and I'm sure you will be patient. They were so good to me when I needed it; before I went to Joe."

"Why, of course, Chérie," rejoined the girl warmly; "and if there is anything I can do for them you must let me know. If they have n't cars perhaps you would like to take them driving."

"Cars!" May Ca'line lifted eyes and hands skyward. "Those they have here are strictly for business. There are two women I should like to invite to lunch."

"Oh, lunch!" cried the twins, who had been letting off steam turning somersaults on the grass. "Let's have a picnic."

"Why don't you have your friends to-day," said Vivian, "and let the children and me picnic under the trees? Then you can have an undisturbed visit."

"Yes, yes, yes!" shouted the twins.

"Hush!" exclaimed May Ca'line. "Will you take good care of Miss Vivian if I let you? She has come out here to rest and grow strong, and if you are going to be very good to her I'll trust you. Will you?"

The twins danced up and down and eyed Vivian judicially. She had been very nice to them that day at Rose Ledge, but they had never seen her since. They were inclined to like her because she was so pretty and because she helped daddy the day the shovel boy was

nearly drowned. Nevertheless they had not proved her as a playmate.

"We'd rather have you, grandmother," remarked Ella.

Vivian laughed. "Good for you, kiddie," she said.

"I'm going to have company," said May Ca'line, "and I can't come with you. You may have a picnic by the brook."

"And if you don't behave yourselves," said Vivian, "I'll throw you in." She scowled at them with a fierce, big-eyed expression that delighted their souls.

They began jumping up and down nearer to her.

"Do you know any stories?" they demanded.

"Don't admit it, my dear. You'll get yourself into business," said May Ca'line. "I don't want you to trouble yourself a bit with the children while you are here."

Vivian looked coolly down at the bobbing heads. "I suppose, of course, you know all about the prince who turned into a white rat so he could eat through a cheese door and rescue a princess from the cruel giant?"

"No, no, we don't!" shrieked the twins, alive with anticipation. "Tell us! Tell us!"

"Oh, unwise girl," laughed May Ca'line. "I warned you. Scamper, children, and tell Nora you want sandwiches for three at noon."

The two pairs of legs twinkled away.

"These two friends I spoke of are dear to me," said May Ca'line. "One of them gave Mr. Frothingham a home. You must let them look at you, for they knew your father when he was here a long time ago, and they will be so interested to see his daughter."

"I shall be glad to see them; but looking at people

is all I'm going to do. I see some promising-looking woods over there, and I feel it coming on that I shall disappear somewhere most of the time and study this new philosophy of ours. What Mrs. Chetwyn has brought to Ferdy is undeniable."

May Ca'line eyed the girl happily. "That is what we must both do this summer," she answered. "I'm so full, Vivian, of rejoicing in this harmonious, beautiful home, and Joe's prosperity, and your father's kindness, I know the best way to show my gratitude is to remember the Giver of all good and learn more about Him and keep closer to Him."

"And remember, Chérie, this is your home, not mine. You spoke a minute ago as if asking my permission to entertain your friends. I'm going to be absolutely irresponsible, you know, and the idlest thing in the land. It's your house, and your cook, remember."

"My cook!" repeated May Ca'line with a start. "I shall have to think 'Fear not' when I go near her. She's such a grand person."

"Not a bit of it. She's as pleased as Punch to get into the country and she likes Nora."

"I wonder," said May Ca'line, "if we had n't better go back to country ways and have dinner at noon while we are here?"

"Are you consulting me, Chérie?" returned Vivian, with a threatening frown. "Consulting a vegetable? What do you mean, madam? I'm not going to know half as much as Ella does."

"That's right, my lamb. Forgive me for forgetting." May Ca'line laughed and started for the house.

The motor drove up, the chauffeur jumped out, and came to meet her. He touched his cap.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Laird. Mr. Breed told me to leave the car here every pleasant day and to put myself at your orders."

May Ca'line looked around rather helplessly at Vivian, but the girl was strolling away. Her attitude emphasized the fact that all this was none of her affair.

The chauffeur smiled at the little woman's evident embarrassment. "My name is Thomas," he said, "and I'm to make myself useful."

This news was cheering. May Ca'line smiled hopefully. "There is the grass," she said; "I thought this morning it ought to be cut."

Thomas advanced and looked about with a critical eye. "It should, ma'am," he said, "and the vines could do with some nailin' up."

"Oh, do you like gardening?" asked May Ca'line, clasping her hands.

"I'd rather be at the ground than the car any time, ma'am."

"How good! There are so many things I've thought of already that I'd like to do."

"Let's do 'em, ma'am. Ellen'll give me a place to keep a suit I can work in, and now I'll go after the lawn-mower."

"Very well." May Ca'line viewed his determined move toward the back of the house. "Oh, Thomas," she said rather loudly to attract his attention. He paused, and May Ca'line, experiencing the feelings Aladdin must have entertained the first time he rubbed the lamp, continued: "At noon I shall want you to call for two ladies who will be coming to lunch with me."

It worked. Thomas touched his cap. "Very well, ma'am," he returned, and proceeded toward the shed.

Shortly afterward Martha Berry was called to the telephone.

"Hello, Martha."

"Why, May Ca'line, is it you?"

"I can't wait to see you and Hetty and I want you both to come over to dinner with me to-day. Don't say you can't. Leave Simon alone for once."

Martha Berry was looking highly excited. "Well, I s'pose I could leave his victuals here for him. I could get him started."

"Certainly. We don't need to have dinner until one."

"Oh, he'd be all through by that time."

"I thought so. I've talked with Hetty and told her the car would call first for her and then pick you up."

"I'll be ready," returned Martha, rather tremulous.

At the appointed time the handsome open car rolled up to her door. In it sat or rather lolled Hetty Woodward, in her Sunday best and trying to look sweetly unconscious.

The chauffeur jumped down and held open the door. Martha stumbled on the step, but finally entered, and Hetty received her graciously. "Fine day, is n't it?" she said carelessly.

Mrs. Berry examined the satin-smooth linen cushion covers, the door closed, and they were off.

"Now, ain't this clever o' May Ca'line," she said in a low voice, "not to waste one day before sendin' for us? My, but she's the loyal, lovin' little heart!"

"And wait till you see her," returned Hetty, also *sotto voce*. "Such a changed bein' as she is."

"Don't you remember," said Martha, "how we said all she needed was prosperity and kindness to grow young again?"

May Ca'line ran down the steps and out on the walk to meet the arrivals and embraced her guests warmly. She wore the violet and white gown and they looked at her admiringly as the three moved toward the house. A young girl, delicate, beautiful, kind-eyed, came out on the piazza and May Ca'line presented Miss Breed, who shook hands with them and expressed her pleasure in meeting her father's old friends.

The twins stormed out of the house, carrying baskets. "Joe's children," said May Ca'line.

Martha and Hetty stooped to greet them and Ella pulled back.

"We don't like to be kissed," she announced.

"Ella is going to be a polite little girl sometime," said May Ca'line. "Miss Breed is taking them on a picnic to-day," she added, and the three passed on.

"Mr. Frothin'ham took us into the house and let us see it before you came," said Hetty as their hostess led them in.

"And we little thought then that you were comin'," added Martha as they went upstairs to lay off their wraps in May Ca'line's boudoir.

"You knew as much about it as I did," she answered. "Did any one ever have such a surprise? Is n't it a fairy place?"

"It seems Mr. Breed gave the house to Joe," said Hetty.

She watched scrutinizingly to see the hostess's color rise and was not disappointed, but May Ca'line answered very quietly: "Yes, you know Joe has been with Mr. Breed almost ever since the twins were born. Plenty of time to create a very close attachment, you see."

Martha regarded her fondly. "I don't know as you care to remember the past much, May Ca'line, but I can't help thinkin' of the day Hetty and I packed your trunk to go away, right in this room."

"Indeed, I do remember it, Martha," — May Ca'line threw an arm around her, — "and I remember, too, the desperate day you came over and cooked in my kitchen and fed me so kindly. When Hetty wrote me of the changes here I had n't the remotest idea of its having anything to do with us, and I made up my mind never to come back to Leacock again; but you see man proposes and God disposes. Joe could be happy going to California on business and to see Amy, leaving us safe in this nest of luxury. That old kitchen where you cooked that sad day is the dining-room now, and my summer kitchen has been made over" — May Ca'line dropped her voice to a whisper — "for the grand cook from Rose Ledge."

"Where's that?" asked Hetty eagerly.

"Mr. Breed's summer place. They had her here when we arrived. The whole thing was arranged for a surprise for Joe and me. Come, you must be hungry."

They moved to the charming dining-room and sat down at a table whose linen, china, and glassware were a joy to the eye. Nora waited on table.

"This is our good Nora," said May Ca'line, "who took care of us in the city. It would n't be homelike to me without Nora."

The guests nodded and Nora smiled. She glanced through the window occasionally at the man cutting the grass. She was relieved of her awe of the liveried Thomas since seeing him in his shirt-sleeves.

"Do you remember, May Ca'line," said Martha,

"how your flowers used to grow and how you said that when your ship came in you would have a lawn-mower and a hose?"

"Yes," responded May Ca'line gayly, "and you see the ship came, and sure enough they were on board."

"I do wish," thought Hetty, whose little finger was elegantly raised as she handled her cup, "that Martha would stop sayin' 'Do you remember?' Can't she have the decency to forget some things when she sits down to victuals like these?"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BY THE BROOKSIDE

TWO weeks passed before Adam Breed came again to Leacock, and by that time the new household was in running order. May Ca'line had, not without some difficulty, initiated the twins into daily duties. They had to make their beds, put away all their own belongings, and dust the room. Their protests were loud, sometimes, when tempting pleasures called outside, but the children found out two strange things about their grandmother. She never slapped them and she never gave up. She explained to them that the nursery must be neat, not because she wanted it so, but because it was right. She explained to them that she had to obey Right just as much as they did, and she interested them to play that the photographer was coming every morning to take a picture of the nursery and nothing must be left about that would n't look well in the photograph.

Meanwhile May Ca'line was doing a great deal of thinking. Vivian was away most of the time. She had found a shady hilltop where she took her books and writing every day. Joe Laird had answered her train letter, and while he did not ask her to write again she found between the lines a longing to which she responded by a newsy epistle.

After the first rush of wonder at her new surroundings had subsided, May Ca'line began to realize the flattering implication of all that had occurred. "A rich man

amuses himself," she told herself. She fell into the habit of mental argument with the purpose of keeping her head entirely cool. She looked at the situation judicially. Adam Breed had bought this place and renovated it in precisely the spirit in which the child of the rich obtains a novel and expensive toy.

"No, sir," she soliloquized firmly, "you have caused me too much trouble in the past for me ever to fall under the spell again. I'm free and I'm going to remain free."

She sometimes wished Vivian were not Adam Breed's daughter so she might talk of him freely. Conditions might take on a lighter aspect if she could discuss them. Vivian often spoke of her father. She dwelt on his popularity in society and how he was courted by the amiable ladies who had in turn acted as her chaperons.

"I tell daddy he's very hard-hearted," she said once.

"I've never heard you speak of your mother," returned May Ca'line.

"She died when Ferdy was a baby," returned the girl. "I'm not even sure that I remember her; but I like to think I do. I wear her picture always." She drew a locket from her bosom and opened it.

May Ca'line examined the youthful face with interest. "How lovely! It might be you, dear."

"That's what daddy says," returned the girl, closing the locket and dropping it again on its slender chain underneath her dress. "Daddy has been a wonderful father; a wonderful man."

"Too wonderful for me," thought May Ca'line, "and when I have gone so long past wanting him, why do these silly little questions keep popping up in my mind, just because he has done this great kindness, partly simply as an amusement for himself and partly for Joe

— yes, and for me? Of course, I have to know *that*, but it means nothing more. I'm not going to be scared into such a belief nor tempted into it."

A relief to her ruminations came when Adam Breed arrived after that two weeks, for he brought with him Ferdy and his tutor. Martha Berry had agreed to board the latter, as May Ca'line hoped, and Ferdy embraced his little hostess with a fervor which his father viewed with satisfaction.

To the twins, however, the arrival brought the most joyful excitement of all, for as the motor drove up they saw sitting beside the chauffeur the splendid collie dog they had romped with at Rose Ledge. May Ca'line had to drag them from a violent embrace of Adam Breed's legs in their frenzy of gratitude.

"Can he stay, oh, can he stay?" they shrieked joyfully.

"If you invite him, perhaps he will," was the reply. "I noticed he seemed a little lonely at Rose Ledge. Here, Laddie."

With a spring the handsome creature landed on the walk and the children ran to greet him.

"If we lacked anything," laughed May Ca'line, "it was that dog. You're too kind."

"I thought he might help you with those young Turks," said Adam Breed. "What do you think of this, Ferdy?" For his son was looking about curiously. "It's not so cool as at Rose Ledge."

"Nor so lonely," said Ferdy. He smiled at his hostess, fresh and fair in her white gown. "What have you been doing, Mrs. Laird? You're prettier than ever."

"What a way to talk to a grandmother," she returned. "Wait till you see Vivian."

"Where is she?" asked her father, looking about.

"Off on her hilltop. You know Leacock is on a ridge, that's why it is rather nice here in summer, and Vivian has found a high knoll where she says the pines sing; and she likes to read and write there."

"Letters, eh?" said Adam Breed, drawing his brows together. Ferdy strolled away toward the spot where the twins and Laddie were rolling on the turf. "Does she write to California?"

May Ca'line assumed a politely blank expression. "I don't know. Has she many friends there?"

"We have a mutual friend. What do you hear from him?"

"Are you talking about Joe?"

"Yes. What does he say for himself? He talks only business to me."

"He writes very short letters," returned May Ca'line. "He has visited his sister Amy." She smiled at some memory. "He says they don't talk the same language. Oh, it's hard, Adam," — the little woman clasped her hands in her characteristic fervent gesture, — "it is hard never to see one's own daughter; and it does n't make it a bit easier that she is perfectly contented with her husband and child."

"H'm," said Adam Breed. "We shall have to go out there some day."

May Ca'line blinked and swallowed.

"Joe will have to go back periodically," went on Mr. Breed. "We'll take the trip some day in my private car."

There was a little surging of excitement in May Ca'line's ears. Much that Vivian had told her of their society life and her father's popularity among the seats of the mighty rushed over her.

His private car! If only he would n't say and do things that caused her heart to jump up. She determined to make her own position clear.

"Perhaps I shall go West with Joe some day, but I am very unenterprising, if you call it that, to be perfectly contented in a little corner of the country like this. City life does n't attract me at all and I hope it will be right for me to stay on right here. It is ambition enough for me and will fill my life full to make a good man and woman of those two children."

Adam Breed regarded her with that quizzical, admiring look she had come to recognize.

"Hooray for Chérie," he said. "May the continuation of the lecture take place on the piazza? I'm thirsty. Who have we over there with the hose?" he added as they moved toward the house.

"That's Thomas, and he is the best man. We have such good times planning and planting. You can't do very much the middle of August but plan for next year, but he takes such an interest and he's so intelligent. Vivian is angelic about letting me have the car afternoons. She prefers her lonely rambles, so I'm able to give such pleasure to old friends here, driving. I put them in the back of the car and I sit in front with Thomas and we talk vines, and plants, and fertilizer."

"I'm glad you added the last. The rest sounded ominous. There are too many elopements with the chauffeur." The speaker looked around at his companion. "You're really happy," he added in a different tone.

"Oh, indeed, I am," May Ca'line colored under his gaze.

"Happy enough," he continued gravely, "to forget

some of those years when I should have looked after you, and did n't?"

"Yes, yes, Adam." She longed to protest that there never had been a moment when he ought to have been thinking of her, but the right words would not come.

"It is my great comfort. If anything occurs to you as desirable that is n't provided here, will you tell me? — Oh, how do you do, Nora?" For here the girl appeared in the piazza door. "Is supper nearly ready?"

"Sure, I'm seekin' the children, sir, and I see the grand dog outside and 't is a fight I'll be havin'."

"Give me a drink, Nora, and I'll capture them for you with my bow and spear."

Nora, much fluttered and delighted by the great man's affability, brought the ice water.

"I'll get them myself. Don't you trouble," said May Ca'line.

"Why should n't they have their supper outside?" suggested Adam Breed. "I'll help you, Nora."

The result was that a table was placed on the lawn, and the children ate there, supremely happy in the fact that Laddie lay on the grass beside them gnawing a bone.

Mr. Breed also modified for them the tragedy of having to leave the dog at their early bed hour by promising that he should sleep on their porch and that they would find him there when they waked up. It may be mentioned here that this was the last time that luxury was indulged in, as at five o'clock the next morning the whole family was roused by sounds of revelry on the nursery sleeping-porch.

While the children were having their supper Ferdy volunteered to go to find his sister. May Ca'line gave



“HAPPY ENOUGH TO FORGET SOME OF THOSE YEARS WHEN  
I SHOULD HAVE LOOKED AFTER YOU, AND DID N'T?”



him the directions, which were very simple, as the road running by the house continued up the hill, and at the other side of the line of woods which surmounted the ridge he would find her.

May Ca'line explained that Vivian was accountable to no one, staying out through the twilight when she listed.

"All right," said Ferdy, "but I'm interested in supper, so I shall be back in a short time and I expect to bring her with me."

May Ca'line watched his tall figure walk away, her gaze filled with affection and thankfulness.

The father met her eyes with a smiling nod.

"Going right up the road to health," he said, "and happier than I ever dared hope!"

Ferdy, his hands in his pockets, and whistling blithely, walked on. When he found his sister she was lying under a group of pine trees, her shoulders supported against a rock, watching the descending sun as its rays illumined a winding river in the valley. Farther on was a waterfall, and below that, a mill. The whir of its wheel came faintly through the stillness. An occasional bird call was the only other sound.

The boy threw himself down beside Vivian and she sat up with a frightened start. Instantly she sent books and papers flying with a sweep of her hand and seized him. He laughed at the ardor of her greeting, but returned it heartily. She swallowed a lump that rose in her throat. It was so wonderful to have Ferdy seek her, to feel his embrace, and to know that at last there was no misunderstanding between them.

"We did n't know when to expect you, or I would have been at home," she said. "Have you brought

your tutor? I'm sure Rose Ledge must have been dismal after Mrs. Chetwyn left."

"I may go back there," said Ferdy. "Dad brought Laddie along, and with those kids I suspect the circus will be chronic here at the house."

"I'll lend you my knoll. Did you ever hear or feel more perfect quiet than this? I seem to hear the insects in the grass."

Ferdy nodded as he sat there, cross-legged, regarding the pretty view.

"What's the idea of all this?" he asked suddenly.

"All what?"

"This move. What makes dad take such an interest in this out-of-the-way village? I'm blessed if it did n't seem so queer I did n't like to ask him. I heard him and Frothingham discussing figures and it seems he has an investment here that sounds ridiculous."

Elves of mischief danced in Vivian's eyes. "He wanted to make a little present to Joe Laird," she answered.

"Little present!" repeated the boy. "Great Scott! You don't mean to tell me that he really gave that place to Laird."

"As true as I sit here."

"Well, how do you like that?" asked Ferdy in resentful surprise.

"He did n't ask my permission," returned Vivian, "but I would n't be surprised at anything daddy might give Mr. Laird, even if it came to be one of us."

She favored her brother with an exhibition of her deepest dimple.

"Is he so crazy about him?" asked Ferdy quickly, all unsuspecting. "I like him myself, but what's the matter? Has he got daddy buffaloe?"

"Oh, not at all, but this renovated house is the one that he was born in, you know."

"Pshaw! What should make dad sentimental over *him*? Dropping thousands of dollars in a village that's asleep and snoring, and motoring out here, a Sabbath day's journey, where Laird will never have time to come. It sounds plain nutty to me."

Vivian laughed. "These railroad men are deep, you know," she said. "Perhaps daddy knows of some wonderful road that's going to run through here and make the property tremendously valuable."

"Personally, I've no objection to a very quiet place just now," said Ferdy. "The village can't sleep too deeply for me. If those kids could just be corralled a few miles from the house."

"They're very nice children," said Vivian defensively. "Ella looks very like her father."

"Well, her lungs go him one better," returned Ferdy. "What's the matter with *you*, Vivian?" turning suddenly upon her. "Have you Lairditis too?"

"I should like to know who had it first," she answered. "Did n't you have a terrible case on Chérie?"

"What Chérie?"

"Joe's mother. They call her May Ca'line out here. Is n't that quaint? But I like Chérie the best. She's the kind that makes you want to hug her."

"Indeed, I did have a case and I have it yet. She is one of the most attractive women I ever saw. She can give cards and spades to all those swells that you and dad think so much of."

"Well, all I can say is it is very fortunate that you do like her."

"Why? Could n't I stay if I did n't?" Ferdy grinned.

"Oh, boy!" said Vivian. "Don't you know you're not the first Breed to have a case on her?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Did n't you know daddy began to be a railroad man right here in Rubeville?"

"Yes, he was telling me, coming out to-day."

"Is that all he told you? Did n't he tell you of losing his heart to a pretty girl who had given her word to another man?"

"No, he did not." Ferdy began to gaze at his sister with a new curiosity.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I really ought not to have to tell you any more," she said, "but I'll add a little. The pretty girl became the mother of a wonderful boy who is going to make his mark in the world. Our dad has given him a start up the ladder and that is all such a man needs."

"Are you talking about Joe Laird?" asked Ferdy, frowning.

"Of course! Who else?" asked Vivian with a grand air.

Her brother looked bewildered. "Look here, we ought to go back, they'll be waiting supper for us, but I'd like to get this thing straight."

"You'll get it straight after you've thought about it awhile," said Vivian, gathering up her paraphernalia and rising. "It's a long road that has no turning. Daddy has walked a long, lonely road. We ought not to grudge his celebrating the turning with a few thousand paltry dollars."

Ferdy rose and stared into the valley while he celebrated. Many trifling incidents of the past weeks recurred to him, but most of all a new alertness and

vivacity which he had noted in his father. He had laid it entirely to his own recovery; but was not even that recovery all mixed up with Mrs. Laird, the most charming of women?

Brother and sister walked in silence down the hill. They had nearly reached the house when Ferdy spoke: "If anybody on earth deserves her, dad does," he said.

"Amen," returned Vivian.

Ferdy was given a room in the house as remote as possible from the nursery and on his shady porch every morning he had a session with his tutor, a young man whom he found very companionable, and who believed in that philosophy of life which had given the boy so much help.

Adam Breed stayed on for several days in the harmonious, wholesome atmosphere which was doing so much for his children.

May Ca'line was a busy little house-mother and made a point of having very little idle time. They drove every day, exploring the surrounding country, and whenever they passed through the village an epidemic of excitement and interest seized the inhabitants.

Adam Breed occasionally went into the store with May Ca'line, and Simon Berry once recounted to him all the tantalizing experience he had suffered with Willis Frothingham on account of the brook, which the latter had offered as his reason for the extraordinary purchase.

Hetty Woodward also listened to the tale, occasionally throwing in her own comments and greedily watching the great man, whom she mentally dubbed "kingly." May Ca'line laughed in sympathy with Simon, who became scarlet with pleasure at the success

of his narrative, as it seemed to hold Adam Breed's interest and excited an occasional laugh and nod.

That night after supper when the young people had vanished to the heights to watch the afterglow, Adam Breed led his hostess out beneath the drooping elms.

"There are n't any trees at Rose Ledge any finer than these," he said. "I'm glad you own them, May Ca'line."

She laughed. "That name amuses you, does n't it? I should n't know myself in Leacock by any other."

"It's an excellent name. Why have n't you ever exhibited this wonderful brook to me — Frothingham's *pièce de résistance*?"

"It did n't need exhibiting." She grew uncomfortable under the look in her companion's eyes. "It was always there. I ought to go into the house and speak to Ellen about breakfast."

"Not till I've seen the brook. I never noticed it particularly. Poor Frothingham, he needed something to talk about, did n't he? I put him in a tight place."

They moved down the slope toward the gurgling, whispering little stream. Frothingham had evidently considered that it would prove an attraction, for he had placed a rustic seat at an advantageous point.

As yet the spot had been little else than the children's playground and dried wisps of flowers and grass cumbered the bench now. Adam Breed whisked them off with his handkerchief and they sat down, May Ca'line unwillingly.

"I really ought to see Ellen," she said, "before she goes to bed."

"Ellen never goes to bed. It's her pet antipathy. Ask the housekeeper at Rose Ledge."

In the meadow across the brook the fireflies were beginning to sparkle in the starlight.

"You don't need any excuse to get away from me," said Adam Breed quietly.

"Why — what put that into your head?"

"You. You're as given to vanishing as those fireflies yonder. Don't you know that we must have it out?"

May Ca'line found that she could n't speak, so did n't at once try.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Nothing — almost nothing."

Adam Breed rested his elbow on the bench near her shoulder and transferred his attention from the fireflies to the starlit profile of her curly head.

"What does the 'almost' mean? You can trust me, May?"

"It means — that I think people are so much happier — when they sail along on the top of the wave and — and don't look underneath." Here the speaker gave a most determined swallow. "When two old friends like us are alone — talk is liable to become too — too personal. I think we should — should avoid it."

Her companion smiled, and a little silence followed; then he spoke again. "Should you consider it too personal for me to say that I only lent you to the other man in that youth of ours?"

"Don't — don't say such things!" exclaimed May Ca'line, her heart fluttering.

"I rounded out half a century last week," went on the other. "You are the perennial sort. I think age intends to pass you by; but in the last two months I have realized how faithful I have been. Don't you

think you should give me your sweet self, and your charm, and your courage, for the journey downhill?"

May Ca'line clasped her hands together and Adam Breed closed one of his over them both and held them fast.

"We have grown a thousand miles apart," she said, suddenly calm under his strong pressure. "I am entirely out of your sphere of life."

"What if it is my highest ambition to come into yours?"

"I should mortify you in your fine homes. I am ignorant of all elegancies. I can see that Ellen pities me because I never heard of the dishes she wants to make."

Adam Breed's low laugh had a tender tone. "We may possibly survive Ellen's disapproval," he said.

"You have put me under so many obligations," said May Ca'line. "Joe —"

"Don't speak of anything like that." The quiet interruption was severe and the clasp on her hands fell away. They felt cold and desolate.

"Don't be offended, Adam," she said piteously. "I'm distracted with all this, for I want your happiness and I think you're making a mistake."

"But for your influence my boy would even yet be ill and hopeless. Can you speak of your obligation to me?"

May Ca'line's breath came fast. "I dread to grow dependent on you again, Adam." Her voice broke, but she commanded it. "If you knew what I suffered all those months."

He picked up her little limp hand and kissed it, holding it long against his face. "Now it is settled, May," he said quietly. "Let us be married next week."

"No, no! Do you think I would do such a thing with Joe away?"

"He did it to you."

Adam Breed could see in the starlight the smile she lifted to him, and her shy eyes. "We don't dare be so selfish as we were at twenty," she answered.

"You were never selfish or we should n't have waited twenty-seven years."

"But now, Adam, — if it's right for you, — we can be much happier than we could ever have been with a broken faith always standing between us."

"It is very uncomfortable," said the man, holding her close and caressing her hair, "for a young fellow to fall in love with an angel. He would far better keep to his own class."

"I'm afraid of the future, Adam; afraid I shall trouble you. I'm such a little ignoramus."

"You will be exquisite in emeralds," he answered.

She laughed. "Let me sit up, please, Adam. I want to speak to you very sensibly. We will have nothing but our own understanding until Joe comes back."

"He can't get through before spring."

"I don't care if it's a year from next spring. The children say I never slap and I never give up."

"I'll take the slapping eagerly if you'll only give up."

"No, Adam, and your dear children must n't suspect it. It will be easy because I shall stay here this winter."

"You might as well try to hide a fire. Do you want to make me take that absurd, uncomfortable ride all winter?"

"No, don't take it. Just leave me Thomas."

Adam Breed laughed. "That's a cheerful remark to make to a man."

"You go right on just the same, entertaining those fashionable ladies Vivian tells me about."

"She has been doing my courting for me, has she? The minx, making you believe her daddy is such a magnet."

"You don't mean that Vivian *thinks* —"

"She does occasionally, and it is always to some purpose."

"Joe says you are very ambitious for her," remarked May Ca'line. Her thoughts were seething. Perhaps in taking her own happiness she was opening a gate to Joe. She determined, however, to be very circumspect. She would neither betray her boy's heart to Adam, nor her own to Joe. Letters were too unsatisfactory and too dangerous.

Her companion sat looking thoughtfully across at the will-o'-the-wisps.

"I must give Joe more workmen," he said.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE CONQUEROR

THE following winter was one of discontent for most of those figuring in this story. Adam Breed's inconvenience in getting to Leacock resulted later on in a practically straight road from that village to the city. At least travelers no longer had to change cars; but for the present he usually arrived at the home of his lady in a depot hack and a very undesirable frame of mind. She utterly refused his proffered gift of horse and sleigh. The schoolhouse was not too far away for the children to walk, and for herself, she got about as she had always done.

May Ca'line and Nora did all the work of the house and Thomas took care of the furnace and shoveled the paths. There never was so expensive a hired man; but May Ca'line knew nothing about that. Joe sent her a handsome check every month, and Thomas agreed with docility to accept the wages she offered him, receiving his bonus from Mr. Breed with regularity and thinking his own thoughts. To do him justice he was entirely devoted to the little mistress of the house, but he knew his master too well to believe that his seal-lined overcoat ornamented the Leacock train so often on a business errand.

"I'll be drivin' her in town some day," he said to himself — "and a good job, too."

At the Christmas holidays May Ca'line and the children went in town to enjoy a tree at the Breeds' and

had a grand time. Ferdy was home from college, where he was taking a special course. Vivian embraced the children with surprising fondness and had prepared gifts that rejoiced their souls.

Her father, finding her averse to much gayety this winter, had not spurred her on as before.

"I was a success," she said to him; "I can rest on my laurels a bit without being entirely forgotten." And her father's interests being so essentially elsewhere he was easily persuaded.

To May Ca'line it seemed as if the girl had lost much of her old vivacity. She could not lay it to the probability that Vivian knew what was in the wind regarding her father's intentions, because if anything she was more loving to May Ca'line than of old.

The latter looked about with curious and reminiscent eyes on the fashionable home. The sheeted and shaded days were vividly in memory and now all the hidden glories were revealed. Her energies were chiefly devoted to keeping the twins' feet off the furniture, and what with that anxiety and her dread of the master's making too evident the state of affairs between them, it was a relief to her when the visit was over.

Before going to the city she had asked Joe in one of her letters if he corresponded with Vivian Breed.

No, I don't write to her [he replied]. I even allowed her to write the last letter. I can't write and keep out of it everything I should. She does n't know that my heart and mind have been free for years. She would n't have any respect for me if so soon after the tragedy I built a shrine for another girl. More than that, she is not for me. I feel it; and as a matter of self-preservation I prefer to keep her out of my thought. My feeling for her is so overwhelming that it must be all or nothing. I can do my work better if I put an extin-

guisher on the whole thing. Just tell me about the children and yourself, mother. Never mind the fashionable world. I'm glad Thomas helps them with their snow man and feeding the birds. They are having a great winter, just as it should be. Apple cheeks out of doors and apple barrels in the house. Let me know whenever you need more money. I can't understand that swell English Thomas being willing to work for those wages unless perhaps Nora smiles on him.

The new road is coming on finely. I think you'll see me back in the spring. Mr. Breed has put on a tremendous force of men. He surely is a hustler.

May Ca'line, being deeply convinced of her son's superlative attractions, wondered if Vivian's rather drooping sweetness might be in any degree attributable to neglect. She had, during the summer, viewed Willis Frothingham's visits to Leacock and seen the tact and frankness with which he had been treated.

He came more than once, and on the last occasion she came upon Vivian after his departure, and the girl was weeping under the elm tassels.

"Do you want to tell me, dear?" May Ca'line had asked gently.

"Oh, it's just that — that I'm t-tired of saying one h-hateful little word. Why can't people s-see 'no' instead of — of making you say it?"

May Ca'line soothed her lovingly.

"Daddy wants him. Th-that's the worst of it."

After this Joe's mother cogitated long. She decided not to tell him. Adam Breed was so apt in the end to get what he wanted. Joe might be right.

Now, however, at Christmas, May Ca'line found such a different and subdued Vivian that she questioned. "No ring there," she said playfully, shaking the girl's third finger as she unpacked her suitcase. She blushed furiously, meanwhile, conscious of a glittering encrusta-

tion of diamonds clasping an emerald, that lay on its chain against her own breast.

"No, indeed, I should say not," responded Vivian. "I'd rather see Mrs. Chetwyn for half an hour than all the men in town."

"Don't be afraid of the right man when he comes along, my child. What the world needs at this stage is moral homes. By the way, you know I'm very much smitten with my boy. I have a new picture of him and I carry it around like a lover. I must show it to you." She drew out a photograph of Joe and handed it to the girl, who accepted it in silence and with no change of countenance.

"It's very good," she said at last. "I hope he is well and happy."

"He's well, I believe, but I don't think Joe is very happy."

"What makes you think so? Does n't he like the people out there? I imagined he was rather gay."

There was an unmistakable access of interest in the speaker's face and manner. May Ca'line, looking for evidence in support of her theory, thought she saw it.

"Oh, no, my dear, not gay at all. He works hard and his whole heart seems to be in the business. He is with his sister whenever he can manage it. You know Joe passed through a very great shock."

"Oh, of course, I do know that."

"And it was not the shock alone. There was a long-drawn-out strain before that." May Ca'line shook her head. "He behaved well — my boy; but he suffered much. I hope Time will bring the happiness to him that he has never known."

Vivian bit her lip, looked back at the picture and said

nothing, but her face could not entirely conceal the passionate undercurrent of her thoughts.

When May Ca'line left for home she forgot Joe's photograph.

"Never mind sending it," she wrote back, in her bread-and-butter letter; "I have another one and perhaps your father would like to have that. Joe is working like a beaver to get home to us. He has had only a delicious taste of your friendship, and I'm sure that when he went away he braced himself for news of the engagement of the most attractive of all the *débutantes*. Should you escape until he comes back, you may be prepared to find unfashionable Joe sometimes among your friends, and hungrier than any Oliver Twist."

Vivian frowned over this letter. "Is she comforting me?" she thought. "Did I show it? Chérie is such a trump! I'm sure I earned some of her affection by acute blindness and deafness on occasions during the holidays. I wonder if they are afraid of me that they hide their heads in the sand the way they do?"

Mr. Breed never received Joe's photograph, and the winter months went by. Spring came again, and very charmingly at the Leacock homestead. May Ca'line and Thomas did artful things with rambler roses and sweet peas.

"I'll have to be leavin' you soon, ma'am," said Thomas one morning, "because Mr. Breed'll be wantin' me back, but I'll get the things all started."

"I don't think it is at all nice of Mr. Breed to take you away from me."

"Well, ma'am, he does n't like the chauffeur he has in my place."

"But that's no matter," said bold May Ca'line,

suspicious that Thomas wished to go, and assured in a warm place in her own heart that he would not have a chance unless she gave it to him.

At last the letter arrived saying that Joe was coming home, and her rejoicing was mingled with nervousness on account of the news he must hear. What would her boy say? If he objected it would be all over. She owed more to him than she did to Adam Breed, and though she felt scarcely able to bear the thought of giving up her lover a second time, she knew she should not hesitate.

Lent was over and a spring ball was about to be given by one of the Breeds' friends. The hostess was a lady whom father and daughter especially liked, so they accepted the invitation.

When the day came Adam Breed told Vivian that he might be obliged to arrive late and that their friend, Mrs. Mitchell, was going to call for her, and he would come as soon as he could.

Vivian shook her head at him. "Mean!" she said. "You know we neither of us care anything about it, but you have the advantage and make me go."

"What's the matter with you, child?" inquired her father, regarding her, puzzled. "You ought not to be blasé like this. It's going to be a charming affair."

"What do you care so long as Chérie is n't going to be there?" returned Vivian with her chin up. "I suppose you both know what you're doing with your grand secrecy and your ploughing out to Leacock through the snowdrifts all winter."

"Yes, we do know exactly," said her father, meeting her defiant regard. "We're waiting for Joe Laird, con-found him! Chérie insists on that."

He saw his daughter crimson from chin to forehead, but her eyes did not fall.

"Waiting for *him*?" she returned.

"By thunder!" thought Adam Breed, "she's still at it."

"Have you been hearing from Joe?" he asked.

"No."

"And she has moped like a moulting bird," reflected the father. "I thought perhaps it was me."

"Well, I'm expecting a wire from him to-night," he said. "He's nearly ready to come back. I told him to wire here and I shall have to wait till the message comes. I won't be very late. Be a good girl and don't bother. I thought I was acting for the best in asking Mrs. Mitchell to take you."

So Vivian was carried off to the festivity, airy and lovely without, subdued and indifferent within. Her father, when she was gone, paced up and down the drawing-room, and if May Ca'line had seen him as he looked in his evening clothes, erect, finished, strong, with that intent look on his fine face, she would have had new misgivings as to her ability to live up to him.

He took a letter from his pocket and opening it read the following portion:—

I have a letter from Joe telling me he is coming home. You will see him before I do. Please leave it to me to tell him our plan. He knows nothing of it. Remember, I have always told you I must be guided by his feelings, as you should be by that of your children. We are not free to follow our wishes regardless of them. My first duty is to Joe, and if he objects, I shall, at any cost to myself, yield to him; but if, my dearest, he joins in our happiness, I shall be in the seventh heaven and shall put on my beautiful ring and let the whole world know what a fortunate woman I am.

Adam Breed read this paragraph more than once as he had read it more than once before. May Ca'line had been chary of affectionate demonstration, either in words or action, and he thrilled at her declaration.

He put the letter back in his pocket and pursued his march. Who was Joe Laird that he should stand in the way? Who was he that he should take Vivian's heart out of her legitimate frivolities? He had forbidden his daughter with more or less sincerity to consider so obscure a man in the light of a suitor. He had really believed that the passing fancy each had for the other would be forgotten in so long a separation. Now Joe's obscurity could scarcely count if he himself caused it to cease automatically by marrying his mother. The humor of the situation was not lost upon him as he marched and pulled his mustache, frowning. He turned impatiently at the end of the room and came all at once face to face with the subject of his thought.

"You here!" he exclaimed, and both men advanced and shook hands; Joe all unconscious that he stood for an impediment in the eyes of his benefactor. The latter heard little of the explanation as to why he himself had appeared instead of a telegram.

Adam Breed examined the bronzed face and strong figure.

"You've done well for yourself out there."

"Yes. The outdoor life was great. I've never been so husky. You seem to be expecting guests."

"No, going to a ball. Stayed to get your wire."

"Miss—" Joe cast an involuntary glance around.  
"Your daughter gone?"

"Yes. Very much against her will. Vivian seems desirous to forswear society."

Joe's lip twitched and he looked all at once very serious. "Ah, a reason for all this exclusiveness, of course. She is engaged?"

Adam Breed, his own plans hanging in the balance, noted even the twitch and the intense expression of the young fellow's eyes.

"I should say not," he returned dryly.

"Mr. Frothingham?"

"Gone up the spout with the rest of them," was the reply, given with a hopeless gesture. "Have you ever noticed how many of the prettiest girls never marry? Vivian seems drawing that proud little head of hers farther and farther into her shell every month."

This news did not appear to depress the man from the West. Indeed, his watcher noted a distinct cheerfulness relax his grave lips and eyes.

"I wish you could go with me to this function," added Adam Breed. "I want to talk to you and yet I must go. Do you suppose you could wear my clothes?"

"My own are right out here in the taxi; I had to attend a banquet in Chicago on the way."

"Enough said," exclaimed Mr. Breed with satisfaction, slapping him on the back.

When later they were ready to start he looked at the younger man with approval. There was no mistake about it. Success was written all over him. No one would ever again connect the idea of obscurity with Joseph Laird.

Vivian in filmy robes was deep in the mazes of the dance when they entered the ballroom. It was the sort of ballroom to delight a *débutante's* heart. Space, flowers, lights, music with an inspiring emphasis and swing, and the conservatory, so indispensable as an adjunct.

Vivian, submitting with gentle grace to the courtesies of the evening, mechanically replied to her partners' remarks, while her thoughts were still with her father at home.

"What will the wire say? When is he coming back? His mother suspected and was sorry for me, or she would n't have said that about the quiet life he was leading. I don't believe it. I'm sure he has met some girl out there who has charmed him. He would have written me otherwise."

At the moment of her father's entrance she happened to be dancing with Willis Frothingham. The young architect knew that Holdfast is a good dog, and during the winter he had not been discouraged from pleasant, friendly attentions which would keep him in Vivian's mind without making demands upon her.

He recognized her father's entrance now before she did, and saw with a stir of his pulses who was his companion. Joe certainly had the appearance to-night of a rival who was to be feared, and Frothingham had never been free from an undercurrent of suspicion that Joe stood in his way, although he had been so long absent.

An instant afterward Vivian saw them, too. If Frothingham's pulses had responded, hers leaped. At once she changed from quiet courtesy into a merry companion.

"This is my favorite of all the fox-trots," she said, "and I'm so glad to have it with you, Willis. No one's leads suit me better."

He responded with fatuous pleasure. "I see that stunning father of yours has just come in," he said, "and he has his old secretary with him. Did you know Laird had come back?"

Vivian turned her head carelessly. "Why, so it is he," she answered. "No, he was n't expected so soon."

Then, with what the poor young man thought was a searching move, he pursued, "Would you like to stop and speak to him?"

"Oh, no, it would be a pity to lose any of this." And the reply lifted a weight from Willis's heart which knew not all the subtlety of the feminine soul.

At the end of the dance Vivian was smiling more gayly than she had done for months. "Let us go into the conservatory," she said.

Willis responded eagerly, but they were followed, and by the time they had settled themselves under a sheltering palm and near the trickle of the cool fountain, the two other men stood before them.

Joe had never before seen Vivian in evening dress, and he absently greeted Frothingham as the latter arose, scarcely moving his eyes from the vision. Mr. Breed engaged the architect in conversation.

"You don't know how it dazzles to see so much whiteness when one is fresh from camp-life," said Joe. "Building railroads is rough business. I have n't forgotten how to dance, though. That's one thing they keep you up on in the West. Will you dance with me?"

One of the many iron determinations which had flitted through Vivian's head in the past five minutes was that she would not dance with him. The fact that he looked so extremely well now, and that out West he had dared to dance with other girls when he might have been writing to her, fortified her.

"Of course I should like to," she replied with a shrug, "but I suppose I can't. I've promised a horde of them."

"That should n't make any difference when I have

come so far." And Frothingham colored under the effrontery of the newcomer, for he here dropped into the seat he himself had been forced to leave.

"Wild Western manners," said Adam Breed, smiling, and he passed his hand through the architect's very stiff arm and led him away, willy-nilly. Willis looked wildly over his shoulder to make his adieux to Vivian, but she failed to look up. Joe did not recognize their departure because he had forgotten they were there.

"Is n't there some place we can go until the music starts?" he asked. "Then your partner can't find you and we will just dance in."

Vivian tilted her chin and raised her eyebrows. "Why should I do that? Perhaps I wish to dance with him."

"Oh, no, you don't. You want to dance with me. I'm a crackajack. I give you my word. Where can we go, quick?"

Vivian started up mechanically and led the way to a glass door which he opened, and they passed out upon a deserted stone terrace.

"I don't know why I do this," she said impulsively.

"I do," he answered quickly. "It is because I deserve a reward for my patience."

"Patience!" she repeated, and a crimson tide rushed over her face and neck, lost on him there in the dim light that flowed through the glass.

"Yes. Of course, I could n't whine to you when I went away — yes, *tore* myself away," he added passionately. "I could n't speak, and I was to be away nearly a year. I knew positively one of the lucky fellows your father smiled upon would get you in that time. I nearly went out of my head to-night when I arrived and he told me you had n't chosen any one. Vivian, I'm here

and I'm going to fight for my happiness — *our* happiness, for I believe I can make you happy. Your father has trusted me with great responsibility and I have made good. Why should he oppose me?"

Vivian was trembling under the torrent of his words.

"You never wrote!"

"Ah, did n't I? I wrote you hundreds of letters that tumbled into the waste-basket, or spread over the desert trails until Hop-o'-my-Thumb could have found his way anywhere. If you knew the fierceness of my hunger you'd understand that I could n't bear to hear about you with the people here. I absolutely had to have you entirely, or not at all." As he spoke he stood before her with clenched fists hanging at his side.

"If you knew," she said with a catch in her breath that stopped her speech — "if you knew what you have made me — suffer."

He caught her in his arms regardless of her daintiness, and she clung to him, sighing under his kisses.

The music of the waltz began and flowed out the wide-flung windows. The two did not move. Joe tried to speak and could not.

She was first to find voice. "Do you suppose I shall be fit to be seen?" she asked. "Let us dance once, and then — go home."

They passed back into the conservatory. Vivian could smile as she shook out and revived her stormed draperies. Joe was grave and pale under his bronze.

A young man, wild-eyed and eager, who had been darting to and fro among the greenery, suddenly appeared before them. "Miss Breed, I've hunted for you everywhere. This waltz, 'The Only Girl,' is my favorite. Let's not lose any more."

"Mr. Lorimer," Vivian smiled her sweetest upon him, "I'm going to ask you to be generous. My fiancé has just arrived from the West." She dropped her head to one side archly. "You are the first person I'm telling, Mr. Lorimer, but it won't be any secret now. Mr. Laird, Mr. Lorimer." The two men shook hands, both semidelirious. "If you *will* be so kind as to give this dance to him? We are obliged to leave directly afterward. I knew you would. Thank you so much!"

The lovers entered the ballroom and moved away in the waltz, leaving Mr. Lorimer leaning against the conservatory door for support. Miss Breed had been particularly gracious to him at dances, he being young and harmless, and he had a bet up that to-night she would give him more waltzes than any one else. She was gone! They had all lost her! He felt sick. Who was Laird? Never heard of him. Who would have dreamed that there existed a dark horse?

Adam Breed stood against the wall and watched the floating grace of his young couple and wondered what had taken place in the conservatory. If they had had an amiable interview they would be likely to disappear within its pleasant precincts again at the close of the dance. He suppressed a yawn. He thought Vivian looked happy in the brief glimpses he obtained of her face as they circled near. Her partner was dropping into her ear monosyllables which conveyed that not only was she the most perfect girl on earth, but the most perfect dancer, and that for himself, his happiness was incredible, etc., etc.

Not until the music died away did they pause. Then with a long look into one another's eyes they moved toward Mr. Breed.

"Mrs. Mitchell is trying to attract his attention," exclaimed Vivian suddenly. "We must get him first." They glided between the fan-waving lady and her object, and Adam Breed met their radiant regard curiously.

His daughter urged him into a convenient alcove. "We want to go home," she said rather breathlessly.

"Why is that? You both look as if you were having the time of your lives."

"Because if we stay I will have to dance with other men, and I don't want to."

The father looked from one to another, and Joe's face was speaking.

"You seem to have made very good use of your limited time," remarked Adam Breed.

"I meant to ask your permission, indeed, I did, Mr. Breed," said Joe earnestly. "But," — turning toward Vivian, — "I lost my head completely. Look at her. She's my excuse."

"Well, I perfectly agree with you that you would better go home. I will have to stay awhile and cover your tracks as well as I can. I shall see you later, Joe. Sit up for me if you are n't too much bored."

His daughter gave him a parting look in which sparkled all her old radiance.

"He can't cover our tracks," she said gleefully as they hurried away. "Young Lorimer has published it by this time."

Mr. Breed sauntered toward the beckoning fan. Mrs. Mitchell was still following the departing pair with her lorgnette. Would May Ca'line ever be able to handle a lorgnette like that?

"We're all perishing of curiosity, Mr. Breed," she said in her charmingly modulated voice. "Who is the

new man? Why have n't you brought him to us before? So attractive!"

"He has just arrived from the West. I am the bearer of Vivian's excuses for leaving with him."

"We are hearing the most startling rumors, Mr. Breed," returned the lady. "Is it possible that your charming daughter —" She paused and finished by an interrogation of raised eyebrows and gracious smile.

"I could n't expect to keep her, could I?" was the urbane response, and the lady beamed. She had been a widow for two years, and with other attractive dames would consider that that elusive fish, Adam Breed, might be more amenable if the light of his daughter's companionship was withdrawn from his home.

In the welcome seclusion of the motor Vivian brought up the subject of her lover's mother.

"Did you know," she asked, "that in their youth your mother and my father just missed the happiness that we are having now?"

"My mother has told me so little, but your father's generosity has led me into some keen suspicion."

"I'm not betraying any confidence, for they have n't told me anything, but I think you ought to be prepared, Joe, because it has looked to me this winter as if they had begun just where they left off—that is, if she did love him in those old days. She was engaged, it seems, when they met."

"Yes," returned Joe, "but I think you have mistaken a warm friendship for something else. My mother assumes bravery, but inwardly I think she stands in awe of your father as I have always done. He is such a wonderful man, he would look after her, anyway, in my absence, you know."

Vivian shook her head, unconvinced. "Daddy does about as he wants to as much as any other man. You wanted not to write to me, never thinking of what might be my side of it."

And here we will withdraw from that motor because the conversation immediately became *da capo, ad infinitum*.

When Mr. Breed returned an hour later, Vivian ran to him and began an indefinite embrace. Joe managed to secure the imprisoned one's right hand for a period.

"How can I ever thank you?" he said in a thrilled voice.

"Perhaps you can do something for me sometime," was the reply.

"If ever I can —" came from between Joe's closed teeth, and Mr. Breed regained possession of his crushed fingers.

"You can begin right now. Come into the den for a minute."

When Joe returned from that brief interview he had a far-away look which Vivian saw took no note of her. She clasped her hands behind her head and waited.

"Was I right?" she asked.

"But my little mother. I knew she was brave, but this — all this." He waved his hand in a gesture which included the stately room. "I would have said that nothing could induce her."

"Have you ever known daddy to try to induce any one and fail? I think it is beautiful. I love the little Chérie, with her fineness and poise, and it makes me feel so different about leaving daddy."

Upon which, of course — *da capo, ad libitum*.

Adam Breed called up the telegraph office and sent a night letter to Leacock. It ran thus: —

Young Lochinvar has come out of the West and settled his affairs in record time. He is not exactly in a position to oppose me. We will see you in the afternoon. Wear your ring.

## CHAPTER XXX

### MOONLIGHT

MAY in New England is so capable of bitter winds which silence the birds and shake the tender little new leaves, that May Ca'line in her happy excitement over the telegram was jubilant that this particular day, the climax of all the days she had ever known, was genial and balmy.

"Fine growin' weather," Thomas called it. She had succeeded in holding him, up to now, and in this Nora was no mean assistant.

Nora all winter had been most discreet and saw no deeper into a millstone than she was asked to. This morning when the night letter arrived at ten-thirty by means of a deliberate bicycle — it was astonishing how that boy could stick on, yet ride so slowly — May Ca'line allowed her maid to have a more satisfactory glimpse of the truth.

"Mr. Laird is coming this afternoon," she exclaimed, when she opened the telegram, and Nora believed she was going to hug her.

"Oh, 't is glad I am. Ye'll not be so lonely, mum." The girl regarded her mistress admiringly. She was very proud of May Ca'line and her pretty clothes and the beautifying which the magician Happiness had wrought.

"He is coming this afternoon, and Mr. Breed, too, and no doubt Miss Breed. I want you to keep the children away until we've had a chance to talk — you know how we want to hear all Mr. Laird's Western

experiences." May Ca'line's eyes called upon Nora to believe this, and the faithful one nodded her head devoutly. "Take them to the movie. I don't know what the play is and you must n't tell me because it might hurt my conscience and I can't have my conscience hurt to-day. Then take them to get ice-cream. I'll dress them in their best and we'll get supper nearly ready this morning. You will be home in time to do the hot things. I'm going to show you something, Nora."

May Ca'line put her hand in her blouse and Nora blinked as the gems suddenly flashed before her eyes.

"For the love o' the saints!" exclaimed the girl, staring, as May Ca'line slipped the ring on her finger. Hitherto the night watches alone and the flare of the gas-jet had beheld that ornament on her hand.

"Air them reel, mum?"

"I think they are. It was a present to me, Nora."

"It must 'a' been a king gave it, thin."

"Yes, a king," replied May Ca'line slowly, her gaze resting on the vivid scintillations.

"Ye make me cry, mum," whimpered the girl, twisting her nose as it tingled; "ye deserve it so well, and it's the pretty hand ye have."

"I'm the happiest woman in the world, Nora. Sometime we'll talk about it. Now we must make the salad dressing."

Late in the afternoon, dressed in her prettiest, May Ca'line walked up and down the lawn. Had Joe really won his heart's desire? It seemed incredible to have it come so suddenly; but as soon as she saw him she knew.

Mr. Breed had evidently given a direction to the chauffeur, for as soon as the three had jumped to the

ground and surrounded their hostess, that car turned and drove away with a celerity which caused excited discussion among the poultry of the neighborhood for hours afterward.

It was so characteristic of May Ca'line that as soon as she caught a full view of the radiance in Vivian's face she forgot her own affair in that of her children. She managed to keep hold of the girl's hand even while she vanished into her big boy's arms. Then she stood off and could not get enough of gazing at him. She had never before known what Joe could look like when he was happy.

"My own little girl," she said to Vivian, bathing her in the love-light from her eyes, "I have n't any words."

"My own little Chérie," returned the girl as tenderly. "To think we have secured you for our own, daddy and I. There'll be no 'in-laws' in our group. It will all be 'in-loves,' won't it?"

Joe held his mother's hand and gazed at the superb emerald it wore, then at her questioning, happy eyes. He lifted the hand, and lowering his head kissed the ring with a long pressure.

The arrival of the twins relieved a tense situation, too full for words. There were no rompers to-day. Ella in her white smocked frock and Bob in his best white suit, both children noticeably grown and with manners that the year had softened and changed, surprised their daddy delightfully, as his mother had hoped they would.

Ella embraced him with joy, but entire self-possession. Bob alone had to choke a little weep against the lapel of his father's coat.

Adam Breed, who had stood watching all these ebul-

litions of affection, now took his turn at the hand that wore the emerald ring. "Come," he said, "they are not our kiddies. Let us go over yonder and see Thomas."

Joe greeted Nora, who then hastened away to her kitchen, her brain reeling with romantic dreams, and he and Vivian yielded to the urging of the children to come and see their garden by the brook. When this had been sufficiently admired, the two sat down on the rustic bench and the children climbed into their laps. Laddie, whom Nora had released from the shed, raced down the green and threw himself, panting, on the grass beside them.

"Hello, old fellow," said Joe, patting him. "Rose Ledge seems to have moved over Leacock way."

"He has to be shut up because he hunts for us," explained Ella, who had fallen to Vivian's share.

She touched a slender chain around the girl's throat. It had tiny pearl pendants at intervals. "I should like to have one like that when I grow up," she said.

"Very likely you will, then," returned Vivian. "Should you like to come and live with me, both of you?"

"We can't," said Bob. "We get our feet on the furniture."

"Oh, you'll soon be too big for that. Don't you think you would like to come?"

"Not without daddy," said Ella.

"Ask him if we can't all three come and live with him, then. That would be still better."

Joe put his arm around the girl and drew the little group of four close together.

"Have you learned any more stories since Christmas?" asked Ella, not wishing to drive too easy a bargain.

"I think I might find another one in my head if I hunted." Vivian met Joe's eyes laughingly. "I'll turn myself into a second Scheherazade and tell them one thousand and one nights if that is necessary to win them," she said, and to the twins' astonishment this statement was followed by a spontaneous meeting of the lovers' lips.

Ella watched the action with wide eyes. The twins had not been to a country school all winter without attaining some worldly wisdom.

Bob, gazing in wonder, asked a question, hesitating and stammering a little in his thirst for information. "Daddy," he said, "is — is Miss Vivian your — your beau?"

The children had supper with the family, and a romp with daddy, and Vivian, and Laddie, and a ball afterward. When the long spring evening came to a close the twins were tucked in their beds, and Vivian, her hand in Joe's, told them the first of their thousand and one tales. Then the lovers left them to their dreams and went downstairs into the moonlight. They passed the others on the porch, where Adam Breed was smoking.

"I'm going to show Joe my knoll," said Vivian, and they went down the steps and out to the quiet country road. "The knoll," she added, "where I wrote you that letter that you never answered."

*Da capo, ad libitum, ad infinitum.*

Adam Breed and May Ca'line watched their departing figures.

"What a wonderful night," he said. "I believe this freakish month is trying to do honor to its namesake. Let us walk a bit."

The leafing elm branches threw very respectable shadows across the sward, and the two moved through them and stood near where Thomas had been training ramblers over a lattice.

"Those roses are very promising," said May Ca'line.

"But what is that to you, my dear?" inquired her companion, holding his cigar between two fingers.

"A very great deal. I love them. Flowers always grow for me, too, Adam. I must boast of that a little."

"Yes. I foresee that you and your gardener are going to have a great time."

"We do now. I consider Thomas absolutely a friend."

"A fig for Thomas! You surely don't think it would be fitting for us to force ourselves any longer into another man's home? We are going to be married in a week or two, run out to California if you wish, or else go right to Rose Ledge."

May Ca'line would have clasped her hands together, but her companion took them both. "You think of such wonderful things," she said, "but remember I have those two dear little anchors to hold me until their father can take them."

"That's easy," returned Adam Breed carelessly. "Vivian can care for them at Rose Ledge and learn how to be a good stepmother."

"Don't say that word, dear," rejoined May Ca'line quickly. "Stepmothers are so often real mothers that they deserve the sweeter name. Vivian is lovely with the children. I think she really likes them. I've been watching her to-day. How happy I am for Joe!"

"Oh, yes," returned the other, "she would love his children if they were monsters."

"And they're such darlings, Adam."

"Are they? Well, perhaps they are. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt if you don't let them keep you away from me."

"No, dear, I'm sure we can arrange it, but what about this lovely place? Does Joe hope he can marry soon? Even if he did, he could n't stay out here away from business."

"No, but I think they will be here a good deal. I know Vivian. She will like her own place, especially on account of the children, and Joe can come week-ends as long as they stay."

"But, meanwhile, Adam. How can we shut up this lovely home and leave it?"

"With a caretaker, of course."

"But that will be a great expense," she protested timidly.

He laughed a little and drew her to him. "Oh, May, oh, Chérie," he said, "don't you worry about that. Who shall we get? I suppose you will want Nora to go with the children."

"Why, Adam," — May Ca'line spoke with bated breath, — "she has n't told me so, but I think — I'm almost certain that Thomas wants to marry Nora."

Adam Breed's laugh rang through the moonlight. "What have we in this place?" he asked. "Is it a matrimonial bureau? Well, there you are, you see. If they marry there are your caretakers."

"That would be good," responded May Ca'line thoughtfully. "Thomas would keep everything in lovely order."

"That's enough of the practical for this poetical evening," said her companion. "Let us go down to the

brook and see if there are any fireflies out so early in the season."

He put his arm around her and they strolled down across the close-clipped grass to where the babble of the brook, increased to a rapid by the spring rains, came musically through its rushes.

"This *is* a pretty place," he said. "Strange we have never thought to give it a name."

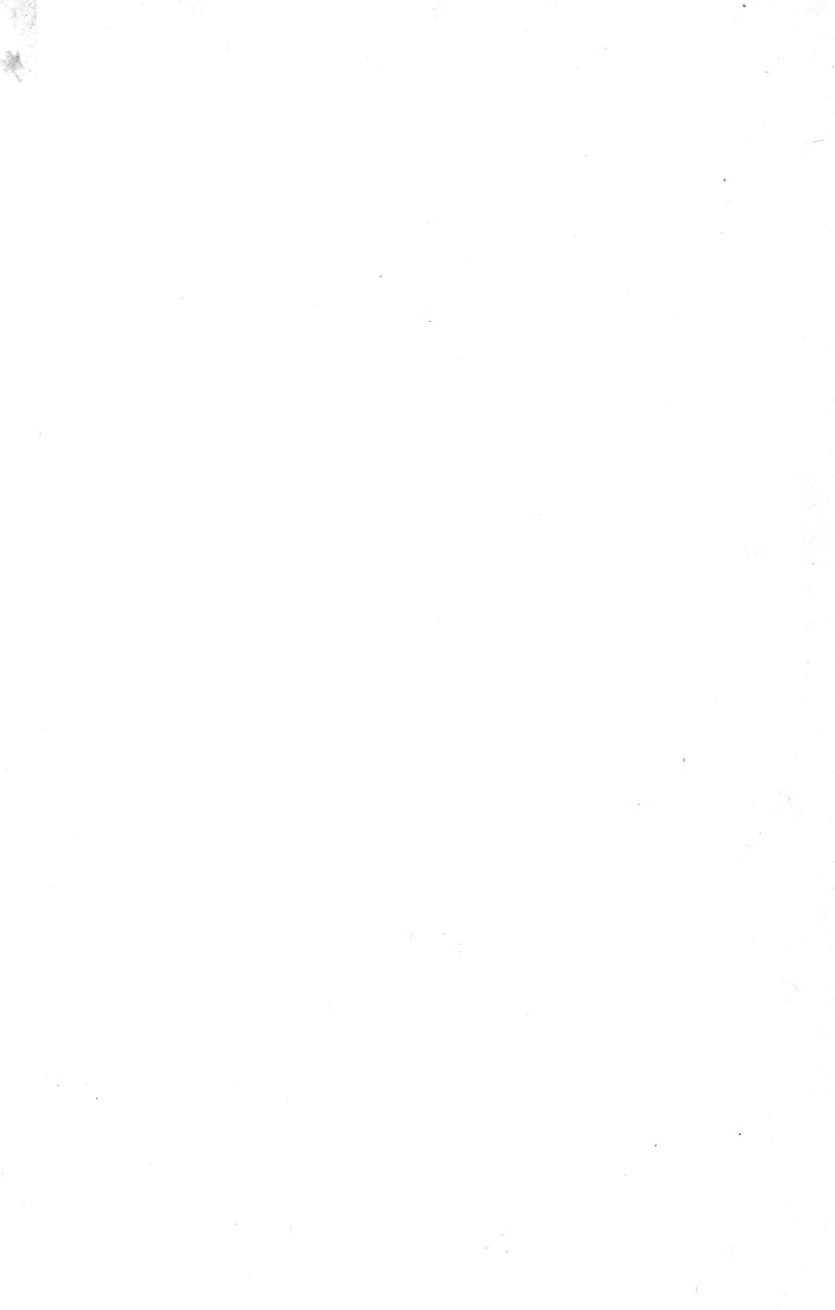
May Ca'line leaned her head against his shoulder as they walked and pressed her hand on the one about her waist.

"I named it long ago," she said, "but I've never told."

"Tell now, my dearest."

"I named it — Hearts' Haven."

THE END



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